

HEALING THE IMPACT OF CONTROL AND DIVISION:
A LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR VITALITY AND
GROWTH IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....	4
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL.....	16
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	28
4. METHODOLOGY.....	62
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	70
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	82
APPENDIX	
A. SERMON SERIES.....	88
B. BIBLE STUDY.....	128
C. CHURCHWIDE WORKSHOP.....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	154

ABSTRACT

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The objective of this project was to educate, encourage and empower members of Columbia Drive United Methodist Church to use biblical, theological and theoretical models of church leadership to transform and grow the church rather than control and divide it. The mixed-method was used to engage participants including pre and post test questionnaires, a four-part sermon series; a four-part bible study; and one church-wide workshop over a six-week period. Findings include congregational resistance to change and transformation leading to antagonism. It is concluded that growth of existing congregations is possible when congregants agree to follow biblical, theological and theoretical precepts.

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I am eternally grateful to all of the associates of my phase peer group; Reverend Eyvonne Whitman, Reverend Renita Thomas, Minister Delores Thomas, Reverend

Tamara Hardy, Reverend Tim Roberts, Reverend Alvin Campbell, Reverend Ron Perceful and especially, my peer group partner, Reverend Ronnson M. Jackson who is not only a prayer warrior but a friend, who greatly encouraged me when I did not think I would make it through all the trials and tribulations I have faced all through the ministry. My peer group has been a model and pillow of strength who offered sound advice throughout this doctoral journey and for them I give God thanks.

I am most thankful to God for His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit for guidance and leadership and to President Wendy Edwards, Dr. Harold Hudson and all the staff members of The United Theological Seminary, Dayton Ohio.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my grandmother Mrs. Mae F. Lyles, great grandmother Mrs. Matilda Banks who gave me the world and led me to Jesus Christ at an early age. Also to my mother Dora E. Lyles, father Deacon Robert C. White, Sr. and my dear friend Fulton County Superior Court Judge the late Honorable William Wright Daniel who encouraged me to continue my education when I had no money and wanted to quit, and then supplied me with a loan to carry on to the point I am today.

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that nobody likes change more than a wet baby; equally true is that no one likes conflict more in the church like church antagonist. An unchanged diaper has led and continues to lead to serious health and emotional problems with infants and young children. Likewise, unchanged behavior among church antagonist has led and continues to lead to declining congregations and church closures. Babies like adults have an ongoing need to relieve themselves just as church antagonists have a need to cause disruption in the life of a congregation. As long as there are babies, there will be a need for diapers just as congregations will always have a need to uproot and deal with unbecoming behavior of a few of their members.

This project is an attempt to provide remedies for churches that have been unsuccessful at minimizing the effects of church antagonist who seek counterfeit power and unauthorized control leading to division, reduced participation and moral, a tarnished image and possible church closure. The eradication or minimization of church antagonist will lead to an overall healthier congregation who will be able to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

In Chapter One, the researcher will detail his spiritual journey and how it connects to his ministry context. And emphasis on broken and controlling relationships experienced by the researcher both as victim and perpetrator will be shared as a parallel to how inappropriate power and control in the life of the local church achieves the same

or similar results. The researcher discovered that the congregants in his context were divided, polarized based on class, social status, tenure and struggled to build relationship with one another. This sparked a passion within the researcher to create a model that would speak to this dilemma. The critical component of the model would have to speak in a post-modern voice and the researcher will aim to shed light in this area.

In Chapter Two, the researcher exposes the reader to several models related to power and control in the church and how they have impacted ministry. The researcher will show how he expects his selected model to advance the efforts of ministry already in place through the use of psycho-theological concepts taught to a postmodern generation. There is a misconception in the researcher's ministry context that power and control is a right of membership to be violated rather than a privilege granted by God to empower and transform people to create the Shalom community of the Lord.

In Chapter Three, the researcher will illuminate the biblical, theological, historical and theoretical foundations that support his research. There will be Old Testament and New Testament scriptures that validate the researchers claim that the Bible is indeed evidence of how the Word of God is unchanged and require God's people to be people of decency and order. This chapter will also include historical and theological support. The historical aspects of this chapter will seek to show how abusive power and control has led to oppressive behavior over time from a ministry perspective as well as secular.

The theological framework in this chapter reveals the researchers understanding of God relationship to Incarnation. The researcher builds his argument based on various theologians and scholars in the areas of congregational development and redevelopment.

In Chapter Four, the researcher will discuss methodology and project design. The project timeline, scheduling, assistance from context and professional associates and members will be identified. This chapter provides the basis for project replicability.

In Chapter Five, the researcher provides the details of the data analysis as a result of this ministry project. In this chapter, it will become clear that power and control among some members is a *to-die-for* exploration and will continue their quest at all cost. In this chapter the researcher will also go into detail on aspects of the sermon series, Bible Studies and the church-wide workshop.

Chapter Six will build on the previous chapter and provide a more detailed glance at the true life experience of context and researcher. The overall goal of this chapter is to give the researcher a chance to unravel his heart related to the experiences in building this model. He will share struggles and triumphs and provide what is felt to be the overall synopsis of his findings. He will also identify what worked well and what needs improvement thereby providing enhancements to the project at the point of replication.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The Bible says *God is love*, according to 1 John 4:16, “So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.¹” Love is one of the primary characteristics of God. Likewise, God has endowed us with the capacity for love. This capacity for love is one of the ways in which we are created in the image of God. Although love is of God, in relation to humankind, love can bring about pain, control and division through disguised happiness.

For the author, Robert C. White Jr., pain was an intrinsic part of childhood. Some of the pain Robert experienced as a child is still unresolved creating trauma reenactment episodes in his adult life. The unresolved pain in Robert’s life plays out in the form of rebellion and can be contributed to broken relationships, divorce, and tragic death.

In 1992, Robert received his call from God and began a life totally committed to serving in the ministry. His Pastor and long time friend, the Reverend Emile Ennis had the greatest impact in his ministry. In 1994, Reverend Ennis inspired him to attend college and instilled in him the desire to receive a Master of Divinity Degree. Reverend Ennis’ leadership has been most significant, spiritual and encouraging leading Robert to

¹1Jn 4:16 (NRSV).

the point of ministry he is today. Robert's formal education began in 1994 when he entered the Beulah Heights Bible College, graduating in 1998. He completed his studies a semester early because he attended classes year round. In January 1998, The Gammon Theological Seminary allowed him to enter prior to his graduation from Beulah. He received a Master of Divinity Degree (with a concentration in ethics) from Gammon Theological Seminary which is part of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) on May 11, 2002. He thought this to be a great accomplishment for him because he did not want to return to school because of thoughts of being too old at age forty (40).

Robert thanks God for Rev. Emile Ennis and the late Bishop Cornelius Henderson who encouraged him to receive a formal education and continue his journey to The Ordained Ministry. He is now seeking to further his education through the Doctor of Ministry Program at The United Theological Seminary. Robert believes this training will give him a greater ability to lead the church into the future and follow clear directions in which God has called him to lead. Since his call to ministry and ordination, Robert has been blessed to pastor five United Methodist congregations. In four of the five churches, God used the gifts and graces of Robert to rebuild the spiritual maturity of the congregations and move the members toward a higher spiritual awareness. Serving as pastor of these churches was most enjoyable and enriching for Robert. God blessed Robert beyond measure and he was grateful to serve the church. Although serving the church brought much happiness to Robert, he also experienced tremendous pain.

In 2006, Robert served The Clarkston United Methodist Church in Clarkston, Georgia. This was his fourth appointment by the North Georgia Annual Conference and the most painful to serve as the Christian leader and yet the most rewarding. The North

Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church appointed Robert to this church due to the international culture change in the Clarkston, Ga. community. The city of Clarkston has become a community of people of all nations, races and religions. Clarkston UMC is a predominantly white congregation and one of the last of its kind. Robert was the first black pastor to be appointed to this church and without hesitation, there was *white flight* as white members left in mass. A congregation of 354 members had reduced its worship attendance to only 75-90 members per Sunday. There were those who left the church totally and joined other United Methodist Churches and some who would only attend Sunday school classes that Robert did not teach. Still there were others who did not move their membership, yet they refused to support the church financially. Many Christians who are dissatisfied with the church often quit giving financially while others leave the church in retaliation.

Robert experienced countless acts of pain from members of Clarkston UMC who thought they were better because of the color of their skin. The congregation represented an older group ranging in ages from 65-102 years old. The exploitation of skin color differences precipitated actions of hate. One of the older members, a white female, laughed as she stated to Robert on his first visit to the nursing home, "I have a colored doctor and now a colored preacher, what is the world coming to?" A different member said to another member who thought Robert was not listening, "I'm not going to take communion from that N's hands." These words greatly disturbed Robert to the point that he called the District Superintendent, who said, "Don't worry, Robert, some of these people are just crazy." To Robert's dismay, the answer he was seeking and the response of his District Superintendent was certainly not the one he was searching for. There were

other instances of bigotry and prejudice forced upon Robert which caused him much agonizing pain. Robert served this church for three long painful years, and this is not to say the entire church congregation was racially prejudiced, for there were a number of good-hearted, kind people. In the last days of a three year appointment, the bigotry grew progressively worse. On one occasion Robert encounter one of the church members making comments about the children in Vacation Bible Camp. There were 50 African American participants and not one white child due to the neighborhood changing from a predominately white neighborhood to a diverse neighborhood. An elderly female member was preparing food for the camp made the comment, "I don't see why we have to feed them because they are not our children. Also, why do we have to sponsor trips for kids that don't attend this church?" Robert responded by saying, "I know these are not your children but they are God's children," to which she dropped her head and walked away.

Although this appointment was somewhat painful, it was also an enriched blessing to serve as spiritual leader of a different race and culture of God's people. Robert believes that all children are born with a heart of gold but the world, its ways and teachings cause a child's heart to become cold, cruel and unsympathetic towards those of a different race and culture.

Unsympathetic pain in some instances can be the catalyst that causes change in a person's life. Saul threatened to kill the Lord's followers and was blinded by a flash of light that pained him for days. For the Apostle Paul, pain was the catalyst that drove him to the service in which God was calling him. Furthermore, pain can turn something rough and ridged into sheer beauty, eloquence and valuable worth. Take the oyster for instance; when a grain of sand enters its shell, the oyster has no way to remove it, therefore,

through much agonizing pain the oyster produces a matter that coats the grain of sand for its benefit and produces a gorgeous pearl. The astounding effects of pain in Robert's ministry have sprung forth the good works Robert believes is pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ and made evident in his faith.

In his current appointment, Robert is the pastor of an African American congregation, who like many other congregations is experiencing the negative effects of power, control and membership division issues. This particular congregation unlike his last appointment has the potential to become a thriving church once common ground is realized and the members agree to a set of Christian values that define who they are and why they participate in Columbia Drive United Methodist Church. Years of dysfunction, a lack of strong pastoral regard, limited nurture and members who have given up on quality pastoral leadership has resulted in some of the existing members fighting against pastoral leadership and holding the ministries of the church hostage. Upon arriving for his first day of pastoral leadership, Robert was thrown into the middle of mandatory conflict mediation within the life of the church. This was the beginning of what would be a long transformational process if the congregation would ever set aside prior historical issues and work with Robert, the pastor assigned by God to lead this congregation.

But not just with churches that have been pastored by Robert. Conflict and dysfunction is an unavoidable incident between at least two incorrelational parties to occupy something that is limited in its resources. It occurs because of desires and differences through struggle in order to achieve that particular status. However, conflict can function positively. Therefore, conflict will always happen in any organizational setting.

The way a society is organized can create both the root causes of conflict and the conditions in which it is likely to occur. If we look toward any society or organization that practices unequal treatment where some people are treated unequally and unjustly, it is likely to erupt into conflict. This is enhanced especially if its leaders do not represent all the members of that society or organization. If an unequal and unjust society is reformed, then conflicts will be rare.

In corporations, the results of conflicts are very damaging. Churches also have a fair share of the damages experienced by corporations. However, the resulting damages in a church are more serious considering the fact that most people sever their relationships with the church and oftentimes with God.

A question then arises, “Why then are church conflicts difficult to resolve?” Firstly, we have to understand that churches operate with the dynamics very similar to large families. Secondly, while operating in this manner, they are also a large volunteer organization. Historically, churches and volunteer organizations operate on several different levels simultaneously. The volunteers that work in the church come from different backgrounds and have different expectations of the pastor and of each other.

However, all these expectations are largely unexpressed, but are assumed to be known. Functioning within the churches are many smaller groupings of individuals based on interests who also have unexpressed expectations. When these unexpressed interests and expectations clash, conflict will arise.

Knowing this, it is clear to Robert that issues of inequality and unexpressed expectations are primary reasons for much of the conflict he has experienced. Robert is acutely certain that similar attributes can be observed in all churches suffering with

conflictual issues. While Robert admits that his life has been marred with inequality and pain leading to personal rebellion, it is no different with congregational members who rebel, cause disruption and sabotage due to unexpressed interests and unexpressed expectations.

After much reflection, Robert is certain that he was destined to be a pastor since his early childhood; a decision that would not be realized devoid of personal life experiences. When you examine Robert's journey before accepting his call to ministry; a strong-willed, Jonah like spirit prevailed in Robert causing him to live in rebellion to the will of God. God used a troubled life to bring a rebellious man like Robert into submission. He was rebellious, which could have resulted from his mother's divorce, his dad leaving them, and the death by suicide of James Alexander, his grandmother's husband. It could have also been due to his going in and out of bad relationships in search of love that he could never find in appropriate ways. Once finding love, maturing and getting his life together, these experiences would shape Robert into being what he is today, *a wounded healer*.

Columbia Drive United Methodist was organized on July 9, 1961 when two churches Glenco Methodist and McKendree Methodist merged. Simultaneous to this merger was the transitioning of the Columbia Drive community.

In 1989 Columbia Drive UMC received its first African American pastor, Rev. Dr. Robert Crawford, Sr., who served from 1989-1997. From 1997 to the present time, three pastors have been appointed to serve Columbia Drive. Presently the church has approximately 150 active members. Prior to the arrival of Rev. White, the church

experienced a significant drop in church attendance, new membership and persons being received into membership on profession of faith.

Attendance was at an all time low of approximately 40 worshipers each Sunday. The church did not have sufficient funds to pay their obligations to the North Georgia Conference of the UMC and it was also having difficulty maintaining its plant and facilities adequately. Since the arrival of Rev. White, worship attendance has increased to average 100 persons. Even with new life and a new pastor, the DNA of the congregation has not changed. Rev. White has the responsibility of providing leadership designed to transform and empower the congregation towards a wholistic methodology that will lead to vitality and sustainability.

According to Lovett Weems, Vision is the *Invisible Leader*. Vision is not just another project or emphasis alongside other issues. Nor is it even a priority that stands in front of other tasks. Rather, a vision becomes the lens through which virtually everything else is viewed. It provides a different way of viewing every issue and task.²

If the vision established is a powerful shared vision, then the task of leaders is not one of convincing people of the merits of the vision. The power to persuade is in the vision itself. If the vision emerges out of the identity of the church, it is tied to the historic story of faith and matches the story of the needs of the time, and then when people hear of the vision, heads should nod in approval. People should respond by saying, “Yes, of course, that’s who we are.” Or, “That’s what I’ve been saying we should do for a long

²Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Take The Next Step: Leading Lasting Change In The Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 135.

time.” Or, “It’s about time!” The basic task of leadership then, after the establishment of the vision, is ensuring faithfulness to the vision.³

The shared vision becomes the congregation’s invisible leader. Invisible leader is a term used by Mary Parker Follett. A traditional understanding sees an organization as a pyramid with the leader or leaders at the top deciding what needs to be done with everyone below accomplishing what has been decided. In the understanding proposed here, the organization is seen as an inverted pyramid. At the top of the inverted pyramid is the vision as the invisible leader. Everyone else finds a place within the pyramid. Leaders are at the bottom of the inverted pyramid seeing their task primarily as keeping everyone focused on the vision and faithful to it. They try to keep any persons or groups from pulling out of the pyramid and setting up shop for themselves or for a competing vision.⁴

As he grasps the idea of this invisible leader from Mary Parker Follett, Rev. White sees this as an opportunity to transform this congregation. He has gleaned from his spiritual autobiography that there is a need to deal with the issue of control on his part as he deals with the organizational structure of the local church. Being able to know who he is has allowed him to understand what is needed to develop and grow God’s church to better serve the community in which it is located.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

The challenges that have presented themselves in sharing the control of leadership led him to the idea of the invisible leader. By establishing a vision that would satisfy all those concerned, the possibility of growth is eminent.

Revitalizing an aging congregation would be no easy task. Not only was the congregation the result of a merger, they also divided themselves based on worship even though they were small in overall number. Each group wanted control of the church which led to conference mediation in an effort to bring the congregation together. This is where Robert C. White Jr. and the congregation of the Columbia Drive United Methodist Church came together as *two intersecting energies*;⁵ the call of God and the people of Columbia Drive UMC for ministry.

A year prior to the appointment of Rev. White in July of 2008, an introduction was made by the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church to launch the Path 1 Initiative. The immediate goals were the training of 1,000 church *planters* and the organization of 650 new congregations between 2009 and 2012. The plan is called *Path 1*, and takes its name from a list of *seven pathways* set forth by the denomination's Council of Bishops. Path 1 is *to make disciples of Jesus Christ*.⁶

For decades beginning in the mid-19th century until the late 1960s, the components of what is today The United Methodist Church formed the largest Protestant block in the United States. Methodism also exerted major cultural influence with its *free grace* theology and its appeal to people of many racial/ethnic backgrounds. The

⁵A. D. Washington, Comments on the meaning of synergy, Doctoral Ministry group session Phase One students, January 28, 2009.

⁶United Methodist Church, "Path One", http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/pr.cfm?articleid=4627 (accessed September 2010).

denomination today has slightly less than 8 million members in the United States, down from more than 12 million in the late 1960s. However, it is growing in other countries, and has another 3.5 million members in Africa, the Philippines, and Europe.⁷

The Rev. Tom Butcher, the key staff person on the new church development plan, said that Path 1 is not about numerical growth as such, but aims at introducing to Jesus Christ people who “are looking for meaning, faith, acceptance, and hope. We are talking about a movement that starts new churches to re-evangelize the United States of America.”⁸

The denomination currently has 34,000 congregations in the United States, but Rev. Butcher said of the new Path 1 plan that 65 percent are not in the right place to reach⁹ out to newer populations. Thousands of the existing congregations have fewer than 51 people in worship on a given Sunday, and a huge percentage of the total membership is composed of senior citizens. Path 1 aims at “more people, younger people, and more diverse people,” said Butcher.

Critical to the Path 1 process and starting 650 new churches by 2012 is the reallocation of the denominations funds from existing congregations to new congregations. Congregational Development and redevelopment in the UMC is systematically being dismantled and defunded in order to re-evangelize American with more people, younger people and more diverse people. This means that the

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

denominations primary focus and emphasis long into the future is in the rebuilding of the United Methodist Church in America.

Not only has the denomination shifted its emphasis and priorities from existing churches to developing new congregations, it has also created conflict among existing congregants of struggling congregations who once depended on the denomination for funding to supplement their existence.

Columbia Drive UMC, like many other congregations within the UMC is struggling for survival which creates conflict for both pastor and people. According to Rev. White, the congregation has become complacent, content and unwilling to make the necessary changes needed to emerge as a vital congregation. Although the congregation is aware of their struggles and know that change is needed, they seem to want change on their terms instead of a tried and proven model.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

Conflict is a condition that can be both positive and negative. Rarely is conflict perceived and embraced as a positive act or attribute, rather society is replete with examples of the negative effects of conflict. Negative conflict can be found anywhere humanity exists. Age, class, race, socio-economic status, professional attainment, religious affiliation or political preference has no bearing on negative conflict.

Some of the more familiar categories of the effects of negative conflict include but are not limited to marriage failure, business closings, church splits, friendship breakups, and community demise. If not embraced and confronted with the knowledge that it can be managed, negative conflict will continue to plague the human condition.

Conflict is the catalyst for power struggles, control issues, mistrust, back-biting and back-stabbing. Conflict creates pain, heartaches, contempt and irreparable conditions. Especially in the church, conflict is one of the most powerful weapons of the anti-Christ and is the most studied and the most difficult to remedy.

However, in the midst of the devastating effects of negative conflict, there are proven ways to remedy its harmful effects on the church and community at large. The book, *Transforming Power*, by Robert Linthicum is a resourceful, eye awakening discussion on how to turn acts of abusive power as a result of conflict into a positive relational force that brings about change and transformation.

Our cohort group's focus is Congregational Development/Redevelopment and Establishing New Faith Communities. One of the first didactic lectures we had focused on defining *power* in the local context from our own perspective. This was unique in that when observing the various perspectives of different pastors or leaders, the local context justifiably so, shapes our perspective on power. Most times our experiences in dealing with various parishioners changes from one context to another.

The researcher defines *power* as the tool readily used by those wielding the most influence in the congregation. Who are those wielding power? Usually those belonging to established family circles by virtue of their status in the community and years of membership at the church. On rare occasions do pastors wield congregational influence except when they are the founding pastor or if they have been the pastor for an elongated period.

The researcher has members who wield the aforementioned influence or power in the church by virtue of being the son, or daughter of family members whom may have spent many years raising funds for the church. Usually such members are a key part of the institution, but have been given undue authority by the membership at-large in utilizing their influence to sway decisions.

As a result of this project, the researcher is learning to use the influence of these persons to neutralize negative conflict, power wars and abusive behavior and transform the church to realize the potential for greater hospitality and unity. The researcher has also discovered and is able to recognize when various power brokers seek to triangulate him into becoming the lightning rod for getting their agenda satisfied.

Another point that was raised during the peer group discussion was Linthicum's statement that shed light on the *Society as God intended*. Linthicum believed that God intended for us to love our neighbor as much as ourselves. Linthicum is saying, that "God's society is based on the hierarchical statement of relationship. When you are in harmony with your neighbor, you tend to have fewer problems with sharing." In comparison, Philippians 2:4 says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."¹

So, what then is relational power? The researcher asked this question drawing on the fact that relationships are driven by the results of an individual's ability to exercise power. In other words, the researcher is discovering that if an individual has no control, or at least shared control in the decision making process between them and another person, they would be less interested in that relationship causing undisclosed conflict. If a person does not understand what relational power entails, managing their expectation and interests will become a difficult task. When expectations and interests are not met, conflict is the direct result.

So then, *relational power* comes from understanding the stories and interests of people we want to work with; colleagues in congregations, neighborhoods and schools, and potential community allies.

In the church, relational power is a rarity in that people, in some cases, never allow sufficient time and opportunity to learn each other's interests. Specialized agendas usually set the tone, and thus actualization of harmony is never even attempted.

¹Phil 2:4 (NRSV).

When the researcher examines the story of Jacob and Esau the point is made clear. Instead of shared relational power, you see the abuse of *unilateral power*.

The story of Jacob and Esau serves as a biblical example of unilateral power, and non-existent relational power. Jacob attempted to achieve a greater power in his relationships with his family in Genesis 27. As the first born, his twin brother Esau held a very important status. He was heir to the birthright usually held for the oldest sibling. Along with that, Esau's interests were similar to his father's; his personality endeared him to Isaac. He was considered the ideal man having masculine features, adventurous, and was a fearless hunter. On the other hand, Jacob was revered by his mother, he loved helping with domestic chores, and in contrast to Esau, was considered *smooth*.

Jacob's mother totally ignored the prophecy of God who stated before Jacob was born that the first born would serve the youngest. Instead, she sought power and schemed to increase Jacob's power in the family, especially in relationship to Esau. As the story unfolds, Esau's mother took advantage of Esau's impulsiveness to secure the birthright for Jacob. Jacob then exploited Isaac's old age impairments to win the patriarchal blessing of the first born.

This was a perfect example of unilateral power. In theory, relational power would have better served the family. In theory, more honesty, openness in communication, a greater commitment to truthfulness, mutual sharing of feelings and a determination to resolve differences in ways that left each person feeling valued and important would have contributed to the family's harmony and peace.

Especially true in the church setting is the consequences of exercising unilateral power. It causes ill-conceived efforts of all to gain advantages over others. In almost all

cases and situations, this results in great emotional distress, anger, resentment, hatred, conflict, and alienation to say the least.

Biblically speaking, God desires humankind to exercise a relational balance. The researcher believes, when there is relational balance, there is equity in power. Take for instance the Creation story found in Genesis. God created two genders of humanity, but when introduced they were presented as equals (Gen 1:26-28). In everything they did, they participated together.

Throughout the Old Testament there is a buildup of power imbalance, however, this power imbalance is rectified in the Gospels. Repeatedly throughout the Gospels, we witnessed Christ breaking down barriers, separating ethnic groups (Matt 8:5-13); addressing the social classes (Matt 20:20-28); men and women (Luke 10:42) and; children and parents (Matt 19:13-15). Christians must see power as something other than inherently evil or oppressive. When wielding influence, God calls us to be responsible. We are to use power to promote the kingdom of ideas, justice and peace.

According to authors Jack and Judith Balswick, relational power should be viewed as empowerment. "In the Gospels, the sinful use of power is replaced with empowerment, which is the discovery or process of helping another recognize strengths and potentials within, as well as encouraging and guiding the development of these qualities."² We value ourselves based on our love for one another.

The peer group also discussed community training and building relationships in the church. As a new leader, in a new context, it would be beneficial for pastors to start this process by developing a one-on-one relationship with as many members as possible.

²Jack and Judith Balswick, *A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 28.

Normally this would happen at the beginning of their tenure. Christians need to be proficient in the practice of exercising of power.

In the book *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts*, Ron Susek says that church conflicts can be resolved in a biblical manner provided the congregation is aware that the source of their conflict is sin. In this offering Susek provides a systematic phase approach through which conflicts generally pass. In each phase Susek identifies the tensions that tend to develop, explains how they are compounded if left unresolved, and offers other practical, spiritual guidance for pastors and congregational leaders. This book also offers an explanation for the spiritual, social, and psychological causes of conflict; the most appropriate means for dealing with controversy in its various stages' and what can be done in the firestorms aftermath to restore faith and hope.³

Marshall Shelley says in his book, *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* that while dragons are fictional beast that only exists in ones imagination; there are real dragons of a different sort, decidedly real. In most cases they do not tend to be sinister, in fact, they are usually quite friendly. But their charm belies their power to destroy. Within the church, they are often sincere, well-meaning saints, but they leave ulcers, strained relationships, and hard feelings in their wake. They do not consider themselves difficult people. They do not sit up nights thinking of ways to be nasty. Often they are pillars of the community—talented, strong personalities, deservingly respected—but for some reason they undermine the ministry of the church.

³Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

They are not naturally rebellious or pathological; they are loyal members, convinced they are serving God, but they wind up doing more harm than good.⁴

Shelley says that while getting along with people is an essential element of any ministry; and when relationships are vandalized by critical dragons, many pastors feel like failures. He says that politicians are satisfied with 51 percent of their constituency behind them; pastors, on the other hand feel the pain when one vocal member becomes an opponent. He says that research by research journals report that 80 percent of the pastors who read such publications need help with difficult people in the congregation. And yet, many pastors enter the ministry totally unprepared for these attacks.⁵

In essence, Shelley says that in order for people to remedy conflict, they must enter into a loving relationship with one another. He refers to the great theologian and preacher around 315 A. D. who was able to draw large crowds to hear him. However, during that time, great people of God were similar to that of John the Baptist; they were ascetics who often taught themselves self-denial and to lead the life of a religious hermit. As time evolved, one began to raise questions like, how can you learn to love if no one else is around, how can you learn humility living alone, how can you learn kindness or gentleness or goodness in isolation, and how can you learn patience unless someone puts yours to the test.⁶

Therefore, true love is not even learned among friends we have chosen. God's kind of love is best learned where we cannot be selective about our associations. And

⁴Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 11.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 147-148.

maybe this is why institutions established by God; family and the church, are not joined on invitation only. We do not choose our family members, yet we are expected to love them. Neither can we choose who will or will not be in the family of God; any who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior must be welcomed.⁷

In *Faithful Disagreement: Wrestling with Scripture in the Midst of Church Conflict*, Frances Taylor Gench takes an unusual approach to dealing with conflict by placing it in the hands of God. He begins his writing by saying that family feuds like it or not, are bound to each other by baptism as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, begetting a peculiar pain and intensity. He says conflict is a perennial reality in the life of the Christian community, and whatever is focus or setting, the Bible can help us live more faithfully with our disagreements and more fully into the peace, unity, and purity that is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ.⁸

Gench says that all parties to church conflict typically invoke the Bible to justify their own positions. He says, many of us are accomplished at arguing about the Bible but ironically, very few of us actually open it up. He goes on to say that our real argument about Scripture frequently exposes just how little we really know about the Bible itself. According to Gench, what is needed is for the church to recover practical disciplines of reading Scripture as a Word of God. We do not simply need a better method of interpretation; we need a piety, a different set of dispositions and attitudes toward Scripture. Gench quotes Raymond E. Brown in saying, "I contend that in a divided Christianity, instead of reading the Bible to assure ourselves that we are right, we would

⁷Ibid., 149.

⁸Frances Taylor Gench, *Faithful Disagreement: Wrestling with Scripture in the Midst of Church Conflict* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), ix.

do better to read it to discover where we have not been listening.” For this we need the company of others; especially our adversaries. But learning to listen to them—even sitting down with them is a bit difficult, given our tendency to deny that those we disagree with have anything to teach us.⁹

Thomas Porter provides a way to transform conflict in his book, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation*. Porter begins by saying that transformation of conflict begins with our attitudes toward conflict, the way we look at conflict and respond to conflict. Our attitude frames our response to conflict and determines whether it becomes destructive or constructive. He says that we must adopt a constructive attitude by understanding conflict as natural and necessary within God’s creation. It involves dealing with our own emotional response, which requires a radical faith. Conflict is where faith meets the road of life. In many instances, our default position toward conflict is that it is negative. However, experience teaches us that negative attitudes produce negative responses.¹⁰

The working definition of conflict according to Porter is differences that produce tension. Therefore, conflict according to Porter is both natural and necessary. Natural in the sense that God created the world with no two snowflakes alike. Everyone is unique. God then adds to the world the freedom to make choices. Then God puts us all into relationship with one another. We are interconnected, interdependent and what arises naturally from this reality is conflict.

⁹Ibid., 3.

¹⁰Thomas Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of Justpeace* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 2010), 12.

Conflict is necessary based on the fact that all is not well in our world. There is injustice, oppression, and evil that we need to and are called to oppose. To transform conflict is to work for right relations, shalom or justpeace. To develop an attitude toward conflict that is constructive and positive diffuses the conflict into a manageable process.¹¹

The classical constructive response to conflict as a default is to either flight or avoidance. On the other hand, the destructive response to conflict as a default is to fight. In most cases, especially in the faith community, we are taught as a default to avoid conflict. This leads to holding on to conflict and allowing them to grow until they explode in very destructive ways. We must name and engage conflict to heal and transform our communities and ourselves. By engaging conflict head on without avoidance with the goal of discerning the will of God, coming to consensus and enlarging our scope of understanding; we actually include the perspectives of others as a part of our own which minimizes the conflict all together.¹²

Porter summarizes the process of conflict resolution in two phases; first you must prepare yourself for conflict transformation and secondly, engage others in conflict transformation. And outline of his process would look something like this:

Phase One: Prepare Yourself for Conflict Transformation

- Create a well, not a wall – create within yourself an openness to conflict as a natural and necessary part of God’s creation, an opportunity for growth and revelation.
- Allow the well to fill – Open your heart and mind to God’s love, drawing you toward reconciliation and being a reconciler.

¹¹Ibid., 13.

¹²Ibid., 15.

- Be well prepared – Be prepared to listen for understanding, speak the truth in love, use your imagination, and practice forgiveness.
- Be well. Be a well – Be a mediating presence in the midst of conflict.

Phase Two: Engage Others in Conflict Transformation

- Create a common wall together - Design a circle process for a good conversation to get to a better place together.
- Share the well – Together open yourselves to God through ritual and to each other through a relational covenant.
- Appreciate the life-giving waters - Elicit stories of peak experiences, grace-filled moments, and dreams of a preferred future.
- Go beneath the surface – Move from positions to interests and needs, generating options to reach consensus.
- Drink deeply the healing waters – Move from retribution to restoration; healing the harm, affirming accountability, and creating a new relationship.
- Be well together – Celebrate each step toward communal healing. Be prayerful, persistent, and patient.¹³

In the book, *How to Resolve a Church Conflict*, Elle Merchant says resolving conflict the biblical way is key in putting an end to the conflict within the church once and for all.

Merchant then provides a five step process for resolving conflict:

- 1) Pray about the conflict or situation within the church and seek guidance. Hold a prayer meeting and read your Bible to discern the biblical way to resolve church conflict.
- 2) Determine or evaluate your role in the conflict and develop or strengthen the proper attitude or skills needed to resolve the church conflict. Successfully resolving church conflict requires an individual to poses patience, meekness, humility and forgiveness.

¹³Ibid., 146.

- 3) Speak with the individual(s) causing the conflict by yourself and voice your concern. Got Questions recommends attacking the problem rather than the person, as straight out accusing the person tends to encourage a defensive attitude.
- 4) Re-confront the individual, but take a few members along if speaking with the individual alone did not help resolve the conflict. Choose individuals that are humble, meet and patient. Grace Bible Church recommends getting help from someone who is godly and not involved in the conflict.
- 5) Get help or counsel outside of the church with a reputable organization, such as Peacemakers Ministries, that actively counsels or helps churches resolve conflict if the above listed methods do not successfully resolve the conflict. Getting an outside opinion or counsel can help shed a new light or a new perspective on the conflict.¹⁴

An approach to resolving conflict can be based on how to deescalate verbal tension. According to Crisis Prevention Inc (CPI), deescalating training is a necessary step in the eradication of conflict. Jerilyn Dufresne of CPI says that listening with empathy, trying to understand where the person is coming from is important. She says the five keys are giving the person undivided attention, be nonjudgmental, focus on the person's feelings not just the facts, allow silence, and use restatement to clarify messages. Additional steps to the de-escalation training process are develop a plan, use a team approach, use positive self-talk, recognize personal limits, and debrief.¹⁵

¹⁴Ellie Merchant, "EHow" www.ehow.com/how_7393587_resolve-conflict (accessed December 29, 2010).

¹⁵Jerilyn Dufresne, "Communication is the Key to Crisis De-Escalation", Crisis Prevention Inc., www.crisisprevention.com/Resources/Knowledge (accessed December 31, 2010).

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Critical reflection regarding the coming together of pastor and people has resulted in the formulation of best practices and foundational evidence to eradicate the systemic and problematic issues that plague Columbia Drive United Methodist Church. Without clear and descriptive foundations, transformation is not possible. Therefore, the author shall present biblical, historical, theological and theoretical evidence of both scholastic and academic sources to support the process of transforming Columbia Drive UMC into a vital and sustainable congregation based on the standards of the Congregational Growth and Development office of the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The first Methodist clergy were ordained by John Wesley, a minister in the Church of England, because of the crisis caused by the American Revolution which isolated the Methodists in the States from the Church of England and its sacraments. Today, the clergy includes men and women who are ordained by Bishops as Elders and Deacons and are appointed to various ministries. Elders in the United Methodist Church (UMC) are part of what is called the itinerating ministry and are subject to the authority and appointment of their bishops. They generally serve as pastors at local congregations.

The itinerating ministry is the process where pastors are assigned to congregations based on the gifts of the pastor and the needs of the congregation after a time of discernment. It is the intent of this process to match the gifts of a pastor with the needs of the congregation. This process led to the United Methodist Church being the largest protestant denomination in the country boasting upwards of 11 million members. Over the years membership has dropped significantly to approximately 8 million members leading the denomination to discover ways to remedy the problem. Outside of changing pastors less frequently, the denomination embarked on a journey to strengthen pastoral leaders through the process of congregational development.

Congregational development is a concept that has a number of definitions. For our purposes, a working definition for congregational development is “A field of competency with trained practitioners who serve the church in many roles. It consists of everything that impacts the parish's health and its ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”¹

Initially, congregational development and redevelopment efforts led to a short spurt of growth for the denomination in certain areas such as inner cities throughout the United States. However, the denomination discovered that the cost associated with the level of growth realized was cost prohibitive. Many of the congregations either reverted back to their old ways or accepted congregational development assistance as a means of survival and not to become vital and sustainable. This realization led to the advent of the denominations current initiative; Path One.

A necessary component of Path One is coaching. Coaching is the process of coming alongside a person or team to help them discover God’s agenda for their life and

¹The Lamb’s Ear Consulting, <http://lambsearconsulting.com/about.aspx> (accessed August 15, 2010).

ministry, and then cooperating with the Holy Spirit to see that agenda become a reality. Coaches come alongside to help, just as Barnabas came alongside Paul, and then Paul came alongside Timothy and others. By encouraging and challenging others, coaches empower them for ministry. Barnabas may never have been in the starring role, but without him many others would not have been able to accomplish the great things for God that they did. Through his investment in people, his impact was exponential.²

The goal of coaching is helping someone succeed. And what is success? It is finding out what God wants you to do and doing it. Given that definition, success will certainly look different on different people or groups, but it will all be tied into accomplishing biblical mission. Far from a top-down program designed to accomplish pre-conceived ends, coaching empowers each individual believer to listen to the Spirit and act in accordance with the mission they sense God calling them toward. Coaching is essentially listening to the Spirit and taking action accordingly.³ However, even with the advent of coaching and other modalities that seek to redevelop congregations, unresolved conflict continues to be a number one concern of coaches and church development specialist.

Though often spoken of in whispers, conflict is a common characteristic of congregations in every denomination throughout the United States. Rather than being hidden in the hushed tones of parking lot planning and telephone gossip, if conflict is recognized as inevitable—and potentially even healthy—it can become an opportunity

²Robert E. Logan, CoachNet® International Ministries, <http://www.coachnet.org/> p. 1 (accessed September 1, 2010.)

³Ibid.

for focus, affirmation, and renewal. Conflict expresses the human side of congregational life—that real people are different, and see the world differently. Conflict also reflects the religious challenge of voluntary communities of faith that are trying to understand, articulate, and live by their highest beliefs and ideals.⁴

In 2000, Faith Communities Today (FACT) conducted a national survey of 14,301 American congregations; 75 percent of congregations reported some level of conflict in the five years prior to the survey. At any given time it appears that about one fifth of congregations have active conflict. Since *everybody is doing it*, understanding how conflict impacts congregations strikes us as an absolute necessity. Knowing how to avoid or soften its destructive aspects and reap the benefits that can come from handling it are basic skills for leaders today. FACT 2000 shows that disagreements appear in significantly different aspects of congregational life. Money, its use and abuse (42%), was a close second to the most frequently reported area of conflict; agreeing upon and enforcing accepted norms of behavior among members (44%). The style of worship, designed to bring members together in the unity of faith, was an area of conflict for more than two of every five congregations (41%), while the organizational questions of leadership style (40%) and decision making (39%) appeared almost equally troubling.⁵

Program priorities and theology, although important as sources of congregational conflict (reported 30% and 26% of congregations respectively), appeared significantly less often. Since these are more frequently addressed in the literature and by courses in

⁴Congregational Conflict, http://fccw-lrp.wikispaces.com/file/view/Insights_Into_Congregational_Conflict.pdf (accessed August 15, 2010).

⁵Sources of Congregational Conflict, <http://fact.hartsem.edu> (accessed August 15, 2010).

theological schools, we cannot tell if greater attention has helped or simply highlighted areas of continuing concern. However, as we shall see, careful analysis shows that disputes over personal issues and leadership are the most emotionally intense areas of tension.⁶

A 2004 Christianity Today survey of pastors used different categories to ascertain sources of conflict and a study of its findings provides additional insight. In their survey we see that *control issues* are by far the most common source of conflict with 85% citing it. Vision/direction issues were also frequently mentioned sources of conflict.

Sources of Conflict:

Control issues.....	85%
Vision/ Direction.....	64%
Leadership changes.....	43%
Pastor's style.....	39%
Financial.....	33%
Theological/doctrine.....	23%
Cultural/social differences.....	22%
Other.....	16% ⁷

Although some level of conflict was almost universal, only one in four congregations in the FACT study reported conflict serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life—not a majority, but still a significant proportion. To further understand the nature of congregational conflict, FACT 2005 explored the costs

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

of conflict. These follow-up data suggest that, of the congregations experiencing conflict, 39% pay the cost in financial loss, at least temporarily. Members vote with their pocketbooks. *Disturbing the peace* is expensive, partly because some members disagree with the outcome, but also because others are seeking a more tranquil religious setting. On the other side, note that almost two-thirds (61%) of those congregations that experienced conflict reported no loss of income, either because of the same membership increasing their support to the congregation, or because the loss from some donors was compensated for by increase from other donors or new sources.⁸

By comparison, the human cost of conflict far outweighs the financial cost. More than two thirds of those congregations that experienced conflict (69%) recalled loss of members, and in at least one quarter (25%) of the congregations the leader (usually clergy) retired, resigned, was fired, or otherwise *left* the congregation. Clearly precious relationships were broken in the conflict, though the FACT survey cannot distinguish cause or effect: did the broken relationships cause the conflict, or result from it?⁹

The Christianity Today survey also asked responding ministers about the outcomes of the conflict and found there were both positive and negative outcomes. The negative outcomes they cited were similar to those in the FACT survey with expanded details on the human impact of conflict. Almost 70% reported damaged relationships and over half reported sadness. Positive outcomes are discussed later in this document.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

Negative Outcomes of Church Conflict:

Damaged relationships.....	68%
Sadness.....	58%
Decline in attendance.....	32%
Leaders left church.....	32%
Loss of trust.....	31%
Bitterness.....	29%
Loss of communication with congregation.....	3% ¹⁰

Much of the observed conflict might be avoided, reduced, or redirected if congregational leaders learn how to deal openly with conflict. FACT 2000 demonstrates that 80 percent of congregations that consider themselves to be *vital and spiritually live* were able to *deal openly with conflict*. By contrast, the congregations that are least able to manage their conflict were unlikely to be vital and alive. The message seems clear. Conflict, as such, is not the problem. Rather how it is approached and experienced can make or break a congregation. Data seem to underscore that, whatever the presenting cause, human relationships are at stake and must be addressed before, during, and after the issues are considered. Further, these findings support the transitional nature of conflict, that when differences are addressed openly and with appreciation and respect for those involved, congregations can use the energy of conflict for constructive purposes.¹¹

Though some congregational fights left serious scars, most conflicts appear to be part of the nature of a human organization and far from fatal. Indeed, the research clearly

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

shows that change magnifies conflict, but also that congregational change in a changing world is a necessary condition for vitality. For example, the data gathered by FACT 2000 show that it is important for congregations to adapt as living institutions reaching out to younger generations and to culturally changing populations in their communities. These data show that the degree of conflict is in direct proportion to the amount of change in worship over the last five years. Congregations that attempted little change seemed to weather the transition more easily, congregations that jumped into new forms of worship experienced major disruption. The data suggest the need for more careful planning toward deliberate, well-supported transitions.¹²

While we have seen that conflict can have a negative impact, particularly if not handled openly, it is reassuring that almost all of the pastors in the Christianity Today survey reported positive results (94%) from the congregational conflict they experienced. The most common feeling pastors in this survey were left with in the wake of conflict was to feel stronger (60%). About a third reported being thankful and hopeful about the future of the congregation. Far fewer mention negative outcomes.¹³

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Old Testament

If the Columbia Drive United Methodist Church (CDUMC) is to experience a resurgence of membership growth, vitality and sustainability among its members, its leaders and future leaders will have to examine the results of how conflict that leads to

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

control has been utilized in the past. Reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of control within the life of the church will assist the congregation in making modifications to its current operations and develop a ministry action plan that will enhance its overall congregational performance. The Bible will provide critical insight into how conflict that results in systemic power and control issues should be exercised within the life of the Israelite people. By examining how the prophets and disciples of God used power and control, CDUMC will have a Biblical model of enlightenment and empowerment toward the healing of the injustices and divisions within the life of the congregation. As stated in the historical foundations section, conflict is present in over 75 percent of all congregations and control represents approximately 85 percent of the root causation. Knowing this, our biblical foundational emphasis will focus on the root causation of conflict; control and power.

Our working definition of conflict is a clash between unexpressed expectations and unexpressed interests between pastor and people. Control is defined as the power to direct or determine. It is a word found in both the Old and New Testament in a variety of texts. For our purposes throughout this document, the words power and governance will be used interchangeably to define issues of control. Control, power and governance are used in the Bible primarily in reference to people, however, in some text it can refer to animals.

According to Genesis 45:1, control is used as a means of restraint in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Prior to Chapter 45, there had been an ongoing struggle for the affection of Jacob, the brother's father. In an unprecedented act of favor, Joseph receives an elaborate coat from Jacob as a sign of honor. When the brothers heard about the coat,

envy and contempt filled their hearts leading them to have Joseph sold into slavery in an attempt to destroy the relationship between Jacob and Joseph. The brothers were so outdone because of the gift that Jacob had given Joseph that they manipulated Jacob into believing that Joseph was dead; this led to Jacob becoming very remorseful which allowed the brothers to control him.

As the story unfolds, it is clear that Joseph received a double portion of favor; favor from his father Jacob and favor from God. God's favor allowed Joseph to rise from the bondage of slavery to becoming a critical leader in Pharaoh's house. When a famine arose in the land, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to buy grain which leads to a reunion between them and Joseph. Upon revealing his true identity, and in an act of passion, Joseph could not control his emotions as he wept with joy for his brothers.

In this narrative, control is used to show what happens when those who are destined for greatness are able to overcome obstacles and maintain their sense of purpose and leadership. Although unable to control his emotions, Joseph exercised the proper use of control when dealing with his brothers after they had abused him in a state of jealous rage and anger.

In Exodus 32:25 we find the story of Moses leading the people of Israel to the Land of Promise. In this narrative, effective leadership control over the Israelites is critical in reaching the land that God has promised them. As the multitude of Israelites who had been enslaved for over 400 years in Egypt found themselves free, it took an obedient and effective leader to exercise control over the multitude as they were led by God with a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night. Moses, God's chosen

leader depended on self-control, patience and the guidance from God to lead a people who were accustomed to being in bondage.

When the narrative of the exodus gets to chapter 32, we find the Israelites beginning to experience the effects of freedom which leads to free will and free choice. Eventually, this new found sense of freedom challenges the leadership of God's appointed leader which causes a rift leading to rebellion among the various tribes as each tribe struggled for power, control and independence.

Aaron, the brother of Moses finds himself pressured by the various tribal leaders to build an idol in the absence of Moses. This pressure represents the misuse and ineffective use of control and power. Aaron who was not chosen by God to lead the people assumes leadership while Moses goes to talk with God. During this period a non leader seeks to lead the multitude which results in a gross display of idolatry and sin against the very God who was providing, protecting and guiding them to the Promised Land.

As Moses, God's chosen leader returns from talking with God, he is confronted with the results of ineffective leadership and a loss of leadership control in the form of a golden calf and riotous partying. Exodus 32:25 says, "Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies."¹⁴ The witness of the lack of leadership and loss of control infuriated Moses. In an effort to regain control and the leadership over the people, Moses had to resort to drastic measures by saying, "Each man strap a sword to his side.

¹⁴Ex 32:25 (NIV).

Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor”.¹⁵

This directive by Moses was a necessary leadership action that allowed him to reclaim order and control over God’s people. Using God’s divine guidance and direction, Moses was in effect working to control the destiny of the Israelites in order for the will of God concerning them would come to pass. Had Moses not exercised effective leadership control over the people without equivocation, the wrath of God would have been upon them which could have nullified their progress.

Often in the church, there are examples of ineffective leadership which caused the progress and progression of the church to stall, slow down and sputter. When this occurs, division, conflict and confusion is the result. Maintaining order in the mist of chaos and confusion is a difficult process to achieve. There are very few examples in history where the church has succeeded in the midst of confusion and a lack of effective leadership control. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all leaders of God’s church to understand that Godly leadership and control is an uncompromised commitment to the will and directive of God. When God provides the answer to prayed about vision; God’s chosen leaders must take control over the people under their control and move according to God’s direction and guidance. There are times when those who are not ready to assume the leadership mantle create problems for the church. In these instances, decisive correction in the leadership position will lead to a resurgence of enthusiasm and the empowerment of the people to continue pressing forward toward the mark of God.

¹⁵D. A. Carson, *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990).

In this particular text, ineffective leadership and control caused the Israelites to not only sin, but it also caused them to create a breach in their relationship with God. As a result, the people would be allowed to continue moving forward, but without the presence of God. When God's presence is missing, this causes a sense of insecurity and a reduction in confidence to do God's will. Opposition, hardship and unforeseen circumstances will arise; without God's presence, the people are not able to move forward.

In Numbers chapters 11 – 20, we find what happens when God's chosen leaders work to move God's people to God's appointed place in salvation history. In spite of the providence of God, the Israelites continued to murmur, and on occasion rebelled against Moses. The manna provided by God was not good enough for them, for fresh in their memory was the aroma of a steady diet that included meat. Coupled with this is a schism growing in Moses camp of Levites over his direction in leadership. The coup was instigated by Moses own family; Aaron and Miriam.

Not too much is known about the years of Israel's sojourn at Kadesh and its vicinity, but this reoccurring theme does offer a somewhat vivid glimpse of how the people were bonded together achieving greater unity and solidarity through bitter struggle and suffering.

It is apparent that the rabble under Moses' leadership did not become a stable, unified community overnight. By a centripetal force, the liberating action of the Lord God pulled the children of Israel toward the center of a common covenant allegiance. This while knowing that there were also powerful centrifugal forces that pulled them away from the center.

We can visualize that at the oasis of Kadesh, these two forces conflicted with one-another. Humanly speaking, there is every reason to believe that the covenant bond between man and God would have dissipated amid the disruptive tensions in the wilderness. As Israel looked back on the desert experience in view of covenant faith, it became clear through their trials that God was uniting and disciplining the people for the historical assignment that lay ahead of them.

The truth of scripture says:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.¹⁶

Eventually, the hardships of the desert and the lack of comfortable living space compelled the children of Israel to look for better living conditions. A group of twelve spies went out from the Kadesh base to survey the hill country of Canaan (Numbers 13 and 14). The reconnaissance force brought back a report that the land was fertile, and indeed “flowing with milk and honey.” However, other members of the team reported that the land was heavily fortified, and that the enemy was larger in physical stature than they were. The enemy was big, and they were in comparison made to seem like grasshoppers.¹⁷

A sharp division arose over invading Canaan from the South and occupying the land. Joshua and Caleb were in favor of initiating the attack in spite the odds against

¹⁶Dt 8: 2-3 (NIV).

¹⁷Nm 13: 32-33.

them, but the majority was discouraged after a meeting with tribal leaders. After agreeing that an adventurous attempt to possess the land that God promised was more favorable than continuing the present existence of wandering aimlessly, the Hebrews decided to *find a way forward*. Joshua and Caleb are the real heroes in this part of the story for their courage in persuading the majority to press on.

New Testament

As we turn our attention to the New Testament, we will now look at how the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity acts in much the same way as God acted in the Old Testament. Notice that the will of God concerning the salvation of God's people continues to be under the leadership and control of humanity, but as we see in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit will do the work of God.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the fifth chapter, we find the account of Ananias and Sapphira. According to this text, control is used to demonstrate the importance of leadership control as it relates to honesty and integrity before God. This text speaks to the critical nature of those who stand before the people of God as leaders. George MacDonald wrote, "Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to *look*, instead of trying to *be*, what one is not." The name that Jesus gave to this practice is *hypocrisy*, which simply means "wearing a mask, playing the actor." We must not think that failure to reach our ideals is hypocrisy, because no believer lives up to all that he or

she knows or has in the Lord. Hypocrisy is *deliberate* deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are.¹⁸

Here, the author agrees with MacDonald's assertion regarding deliberate deception, especially when it comes to leadership, power and control. The text clearly shows that Ananias and Sapphira are not authentic leaders, rather they appear to be counterfeit leaders; persons pretending to have the gifts and graces necessary for others to follow when in effect, they are hypocrites posing as persons qualified to lead and control.

A consistent attribute of a congregation in decline is the lack of effective leadership and leadership control. Ineffective leadership control is incapable of negotiating the various challenges and changes that occur regularly in the life of congregations today. When ineffective leadership control is present, not only will the congregation be operating outside the will of God, but the results of the decisions of the ineffective leader will cause chaos and hopelessness in the life of the members.

The book of Acts chapter 5:4 demonstrates how God feels about those who assume the power and control of leadership positions to the detriment of God's people. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, their inability to part with all of the proceeds of the sale of a piece of property promised to the church caused them to make choices that are inconsistent with the integrity needed for Godly leadership. Ultimately their choices caused their demise.

Acts 27 beginning with the 13th verse is the account of leadership disobedience in the midst of uncertain weather conditions. In this account, we find Paul, after being

¹⁸W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books: 1996).

sentenced to prison by Caesar for standing up for God on a ship headed for Rome. As the ship moves to its destination, a raging sea came upon the ship. The pilot steered westward toward Crete and when they reached Fair Havens, a decision had to be made regarding whether to stay in Fair Havens or try to make it to Phoenix which was about 40 miles away. “His approach to making this decision is a classic illustration of how *not* to determine the will of God. Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens. They had already encountered adverse winds, and it was now the start of the stormy season.”¹⁹ Against the prophetic advice of Paul, the pilot decided to head for Phoenix; as they sailed, what began as a gentle breeze turned into a terrible storm. As the storm grew worse, the crew did all it could to keep the ship afloat. They wrapped ropes (or chains) around the hull so the boat would not come apart, and they took down some of the sails. The second day, they started throwing some of the wheat overboard, and the third day they discarded the furnishings. Because of the storm, they could not see the sun or the stars, so it was impossible to determine their position. The situation seemed hopeless, and it all happened because one man would not listen to God’s messenger.

Sometimes we get ourselves into storms for the same reasons: impatience, accepting expert advice that is contrary to God’s will, following the majority, and trusting *ideal* conditions. “He that believeth shall not make haste”. It pays to listen to God’s Word.²⁰

This account of disobedience is another example of how ineffective leadership and control can create urgent problems. In this instance, power and control was given

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

over to the perceived leader based on knowledge and experience. However, when God's chosen leader is present, the experience and knowledge of others is not applicable, no matter whom it is; even if God's chosen leader is not the leader chosen by the people. As a result of the people following the pilot and not Paul, valuable cargo was lost and the people were in a position that they did not know what to do. Ultimately Paul assumed the leadership control, spoke the Word of God to the people and led them to safety. As stated earlier, it pays to listen to God's Word, spoken by God's leader who is entrusted with leadership control over God's people.

Theological Foundations

"Theology is described as the language about God. Christian theology is language about God's liberating activity in the world on behalf of the freedom of the oppressed. Any talk about God that fails to make God's liberation of the oppressed its starting point is not Christian. It may be philosophical and have some relation to scripture, but it is not Christian. For the word "Christian" connects theology inseparably to God's will to set the captives free."²¹

This profound statement by one of the leading black theologians unapologetically rescues the language of Christian theology from those who would confuse its meaningful purpose with anything other than God's desire to set the captives free. When we examine the Exodus story, we see the underlying story that provides the foundation for all of scripture and the plight of humankind. The end result of our biblical experiences no matter the book or the gospel, or epistle deals with a dominant theme of breaking free of

²¹Ibid., 4.

something, whether it is sickness, entrapment, enslavement, poverty, deceitfulness or even death.

James Cone believes there are many ways to look at the Exodus story of the Hebrew slaves' flight from Egypt, and which continues through the second Exodus from Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple. He believes that there are undoubtedly many ways to look at this story, but the importance of the Biblical message is clear on this point: "God's salvation is revealed in the liberation of slaves from socio-political bondage."²² He also believes that the liberation theme applies to the New Testament as well. "The New Testament does not invalidate the Old. The central figure of the New Testament, Jesus Christ is found in God's will to make liberation not simply the property of one people (Hebrews) but all of humankind."²³

The mere testimonial story of the women with the issue of blood, the healing of the leper, and the raising of Lazarus from death were all revelations that liberation for all was God's intention from the beginning.

The resurrection means that God achieved victory over oppression, so that the poor no longer were determined by poverty. Cone's point is that this is true for not only the *House of Israel* but for all the wretched of the land. "The incarnation then is simply God taking upon the divine self human suffering and humiliation. The resurrection is the divine victory over suffering, the bestowal of freedom to all who are weak and helpless."²⁴ Cone believes this is the central meaning of the biblical story.

²²Ibid., 9.

²³Ibid., 4.

²⁴Ibid., 8-9.

In essence, Cone believes that Christian theology begins and ends with the Biblical story of God's liberation of the weak and the poor. If this were case and point, then one would have to agree with Cone's idea that the meaning of crucifixion then is God's identifiable means to the oppressed. God's victory over death then is the oppressed victory over poverty.

In validating whether or not my problem statement is supported by theology, Cone makes a supporting statement that substantiates it to say the least. He says, "When we focus on scripture, theology is granted the freedom to take seriously its social and political situation without being determined by it."²⁵ So, whose social situation does our theology represent? For whom do we speak? He says the importance of scripture in our theology is that it can help us to answer that question so as to represent the political interest of the *one* about whom Christianity speaks. He goes on to mention how scripture can virtually liberate theology to be Christian in the contemporary situation.

When the researcher examines Cone's philosophy and ideology, somehow an explanation of the drive, zeal, and passion for ministry begins to make sense. Drawing on humble beginnings, which included a life of difficulties, or the way Cone puts it, "a life of poverty in the midst of an oppressive period", the researcher can now understand the passion he has in ministry.²⁶

The one point the researcher tends to agree with Cone, is when for instance, he mentions scripture as the unifying point whereby there would be no need for distinction between Black and White theologies. He just believes that the underlying theme and

²⁵Ibid.,10.

²⁶Ibid., 5,6.

manner in which Christ suffers points to a definitive conclusion that the central theme of Biblical tradition then is liberation.

The researcher knows and understands the purpose behind his calling to Columbia Drive UMC, and can clearly see the reasoning behind the difficulty he has experienced in moving the people from aimlessly wandering in the desert of stagnation.

So then, what is the church? And, what then is the identity of the church? Cone says, "If we separate the doctrine of the church from its historical embodiment in our congregational life, we will also ignore the social and political significance of our creedal formulations."²⁷ James H. Harris says, "From slavery to the civil rights movement, the church has played an indecisive and somewhat passive role in changing the status quo."²⁸ Just as Cone believes, Biblical tradition should stand for nothing less than the liberation of the oppressed and poverty-stricken. The researcher believes the church should stand for nothing less than the fostering of liberation and social change in the minds of the people.

In any Black church and especially one of the Methodist persuasion the Black preacher then has the responsibility to ensure that the worship, prayers, songs, activities, programs and everything else the church does in the name of Jesus Christ resembles the belief that Jesus was the liberator as Black theology has always defined.

Why is it necessary? If liberation theology and its definition were accepted, the church would respond differently and with more of an urgent message. Remember, in early church history, the role of the church bordered on reformation. In other words, the

²⁷James Cone, *Commenting on, what is the Church?*, 111.

²⁸James Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1952), 2.

church did not sit idle by and watch the suffering of its people, but eventually took an active role in their social and political well being. Some of the atrocities that were committed by the Roman Catholic Church caused a reformation that literally changed the expectation and the role the future church would play. The church would realize its role and the need to redefine its role with the ever-changing patterns of time.

According to author Gayraud S. Wilmore, “Black religion has not always in all circumstances functioned for the advancement of Blacks and the solution of some of their most perplexing problems.” But, he goes on to say, “It is difficult to understand how even the most skeptical observers of Black religious experience in America can deny that on the whole religion and religious institutions have served Blacks well. One can scarcely imagine how they would have fared without them.”²⁹

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on this particular conversation. Why research the meaning of Black Theology as Liberation? Shouldn't those of us, who share the same ideas, agree on this theology of liberation for the suffering? What has come between those of us, when it's vividly clear from the powerful story of the children of Israel's sojourn from Egypt to the Promised Land, and then through the New Testament to Jesus' crucifixion that our gospel cries of liberation? Why aren't we all aligning together and fighting on one accord, this thing called injustice?

Wilmore alludes to the fact that Blacks in the United States and the Caribbean are for the most part Christians, but in different ways from what we usually understand by the term. “The nonsystematic, ambivalent Christianity of Blacks has been understood in

²⁹Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 2.

terms of evangelicalism and otherworldliness, but it has produced one of the worldliest empirical religious traditions in the New World. Its roots are not in Rome or Geneva, but in Calabar, West Kingston, Jamaica, and the plantation country of North America. We have been deceived into equating it with its subsequent institutionalization in established churches.

In the researcher's opinion, the contemporary church is still stuck in the survival tradition by way of their thirst for acceptance in mainstream culture. Instead of the church being in survival mode, as shield, and protector, we have seen it used as a way of social acceptance. For example, the musical style often expressed the plight of our experiences. Music was also a form of communication between slaves, yet today, we have seen this transformation of purpose. What was Black tradition (hand clapping, rhythmic feet stomping, drumming) has been traded, and somewhat defined as music of the illiterate. Many Black churches have resorted to singing classical music as a way of emulating the Anglican churches, while hoping for social acceptance.

In the beginning, our people simply made the best of a bad situation (survival tradition). Today of course, this is no longer the case. In the beginning, Blacks could not be expected to concern themselves about liberation unless they first developed survival skills.

Theoretical Foundations

When we consider the theoretical foundations that support this author's work, it is important to discuss what scholars, theologians and ministry practitioners have done by way of problem solving. Being aware and observant of other models and methods of

problem solving makes it possible to build on existing scholarship and methods. In the book, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict*, Jim Van Yperen says that in most churches, most people usually complain about symptoms instead of the root causation of the problem that lies deep below the surface. He says that as long as we treat the symptom and not problem, conflict in the church will remain. Yperen says that there are four systemic areas in most churches that lead to conflict; cultural, structural, spiritual and theological.³⁰

Hugh F. Halverstadt says in *Managing Church Conflict* that church fights and conflict are devastating because parties' core identities are at risk. Spiritual commitments and faith understandings are highly inflammable because they are central to one's psychological identity. When Christians differ over beliefs or commitments, they may question or even condemn one another's spirituality or character. When this happens, their self-esteem is on the line. That is why parties slip so easily into taking differences personally often launching personal attacks. When church members feel that their worldview or personal integrity is being questioned or condemned, they often become emotionally violent and violating. Any means are used to justify their goal of emotional self-protection.³¹

³⁰Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2002), 27.

³¹Hugh F. Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press), 2.

According to Jackson W. Carroll, in his book *As One With Authority*, it is not possible for the church in its various manifestations to exist in faithfulness to its calling without the willingness of its members to submit themselves to the authority of its deepest convictions about God, God's purpose for the world, and the church's role in those purposes. These relationships must be managed; when management happens authority is the end result.³²

According to Carroll, authority is a difficult and complex concept. In the church, to have authority is to use power in ways that a congregation or church body recognized as legitimate, as consonant with and contributing to the basic beliefs and purposes of the church. Exercising authority legitimately translates into directing, influencing, coordinating or guiding the thought or behavior of others in the congregation in ways that they acknowledge is right. The misuse of power often results in the illegitimate use of authority causing division, rifts and mistrust among the congregational members.³³

For Christians, authority or legitimate power in the church has typically been grounded in the church's convictions about God as we know God in various historical experiences, and especially in the history of Jesus Christ. The convictions and experiences, on which they rest, are the ultimate source and defining character of the power that leaders exercise legitimately in the church. Obedience comes as a result of people's ultimate belief in God and God's purpose for the world.³⁴ Therefore, abuse and oppression come most often when those persons who are given positions and titles of

³²Jackson W. Carroll, *As One With Authority* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1991), 35.

³³*Ibid.*, 37.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 43.

authority in the church misuse their positions and titles for personal and selfish gain inconsistent with the ultimate purpose of granting authority.

Abuse and oppression matriculate in various streams of life. One of the most familiar is that of people who exercise power over others. However, abuse and oppression can also occur when laity abuses the power of the pew. The power of the pew is characterized by the gross disregard of the sacred with actions unbecoming Christian conduct and behavior.

Kenneth C. Haugk calls lay persons who are abusive and oppressive antagonist. Antagonists can obliterate a sense of the presence of God's love in individuals and in the faith community. These persons wantonly, selfishly, and destructively attack others. In a congregation this can mean repeated disruption of boards, committees, and the entire congregation. They leave in their wake incidental damage that is deep and destructive.³⁵

Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of non-substantive evidence, go out of their way to make unrealistic demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity.³⁶

In order to deal with antagonists in the church and reduce and/or eliminate abuse and oppression in the church and the congregation, Haugk gives six steps: (1) Be the best possible leader you can be and do your job effectively, (2) Do not panic or bring other

³⁵Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonist in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing 1988), 29-30.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 21.

activities to a screeching halt while discovering who the antagonist is, (3) Accept the fact that this is not a critical issue that need immediate identification. Seeking the antagonist out could cause more trouble than ignoring them, (4) Act confidently; weakness invites and prolongs attacks, strength repels it, (5) Note the locations and tensions and disturbances and (6) Recognize that a conflict free church is a myth and people will always be critical, therefore you will never be in a situation where somebody isn't griping about something.³⁷

When dealing with antagonists, the congregation can come together to form a phalanx; a Greek term that means a well-armed unit that stands together, shoulder to shoulder forming a mobile, almost impenetrable wall of defense. When presenting a unified front, realize that the success of your phalanx depends on the degree to which leaders function as a consistent unified whole. The weakness of one individual's stands can prove disastrous.³⁸

In G. Lloyd Rediger's book *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, a clergy killer is a persons who intentionally targets pastors for serious injury or destruction. He or she is not a normal dissident, nor the typical attitude challenged parishioner, but they are deadly and they have expandable influence that typically attracts people with common gripes, frustrations, or misguided agendas. Clergy killers are destructive, determined, deceitful, demonic, and filled with denial.

³⁷Ibid., 124.

³⁸Ibid., 153.

They are masters of disguise and can present themselves as being pious active members who are *only doing this for the good of the church*.³⁹

Even the most proficient pastor cannot ward off the attack of a clergy killer; therefore they must come to terms with diversity and critics, and learn how to negotiate the differences.

Survival often begins by changing thought patterns such as:

- Believing that someone in the life of the church actually wants to destroy them
- Understand denominational structures have little power or inclination to save you
- Learn the danger signals and patterns of behavior
- Be aware that pro-action is far better than reaction
- Building relationships in the congregation provides protection
- Accept the fact of evil and mental disorder in the church
- Expect the attacks to have serious negative effects on the congregation⁴⁰

The final area of consideration for clergy killers is for the pastor to have appropriate self-care in order to condition the body, mind, and spirit to fulfill God's purpose. When pastors forget how to be well, they often find themselves being victim to sickness due to stress, anxiety, anxiousness, worrying and inappropriately carrying the burdens of the congregation on their shoulders.

³⁹G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 8-10.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 134.

Conflict is a by-product of abuse and oppression. Juxtaposed to conflict are obedience; obedience to the Word of God and obedience to the doctrinal standards of denominational judicatories that produce vital and healthy congregations. It would be safe to say that unhealthy congregations have a higher propensity to engage in conflict, abuse and oppression while healthy congregations operate from the vantage point of obedience. Robert Schnase argues that healthy congregations are fruitful congregations. If trees are known by the fruit they bear, then according to Schnase, radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service and extravagant generosity are the fruit generated from fruitful congregations. Schnase says the most visible way God knits people into community to fulfill the mission of Christ is through congregations. When congregations are fruitful, they develop practices that lead to ongoing fruitfulness.⁴¹

Often, congregations finding themselves in conflict or in the midst of abuse and oppression must make the decision to unlearn behaviors that are destructive to its life. Abusive congregations who are not vital and growing share common characteristics; unlearning these characteristics is necessary for the congregation to move forward. Mike Slaughter declares that in order to unlearn anything, you must be willing to go in a different direction. It requires congregations to identify ways they were wrong and to rebuild in a new direction. Unlearning may mean leaving the status quo in order to respond to the voice of Jesus.⁴²

⁴¹Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 9.

⁴²Michael Slaughter, *Unlearning Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2002), 23.

The model of the Unlearning Church suggest that congregations be willing to focus on personalized pathways of discipleship that meet individual needs, they embrace the both-and of paradox where two seemingly contradictory attitudes exist at the same time, engage people through personal interaction and not doctrinal ideology and demonstrate authentic lifestyles of reckless love. The opposite of these attributes seduce congregations from discipleship and servant leadership to social clubs and turf clicks; the beginning of the demise of well-meaning and well intentioned people of God.

Because churches become what their leaders embody, they tend to replicate whatever the leader models. This means that unlearned leaders must demonstrate the presence of the rule of God as a way of life. This will allow their spiritual influence to transcend methodologies to the passion and power of the spirit. Unlearning leaders work out of their *sweet spot*, that is, they tend to keep their level of service concentrated around the center of their passion and giftedness for service. Unlearning leaders must operate out of an intuitive sense of God's direction. They must be willing to trust the spirit and move in a direction that is not only pleasing to God but will bless and be of benefit to the congregation.

For those who strive to be obedient to the will of God in the midst of abuse and oppression, Reggie McNeal suggests congregational leaders and church members be prepared to answer six questions which will define their future direction. Abuse and oppression started out as a desire to serve God in congregational life. The lack of internal controls and not enough due-diligence on the evolution of humanity and the shifts in spiritual topography has caused the church to substitute its own character from church to clubhouse where religious people hang out with other people who think, dress, behave,

vote, and believe like them. McNeal suggests that these groupings of people who have morphed from church to clubhouse with like values and characteristics also find themselves asking the wrong questions in an effort to get answers with which they are comfortable. If you continue to ask the wrong question, invariably you will continue to receive the wrong answer.⁴³

McNeal says if you solve the wrong problem, you have wasted a lot of energy and perhaps fooled yourself that you have done something significant. The six tough questions that McNeal says all congregations who seek to be obedient to the will of God in their ministry are (1) Why is the current church culture in North America on life support living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order?; (2) What is the significance of moving from church growth to kingdom growth?; (3) How are churchgoers dealing with moving from a reformation that frees the church to a reformation that frees the people from the institutional church?; (4) How does the church move from developing church members to developing followers of Jesus Christ?; (5) How does the church move from planning for the future to preparing for the future?; (6) How does the church move from developing leaders for church work to developing leaders for the Christian movement?⁴⁴

Once congregations emerge from answering the right questions concerning congregational life, they must then transition from where they are to where God is calling

⁴³Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishing), xvi.

⁴⁴Ibid.

them to be. Thomas G. Bandy refers to this process as coaching change. Bandy says that coaching is not about winning games. It is about growing winning people.⁴⁵

Bandy says that the church has been on the losing side of the ledger for quite some time. In fact most Christendom congregations have been on the longest losing streak in denominational history with decreasing worship attendance, smaller Sunday schools, aging participants, less outreach and more closures than ever before. The laity are demoralized, the clergy are unhappy, and the *fans* are beyond critical: they have given up.⁴⁶

If the church is to be obedient to the will of God, the first step toward changing is to stop loving the church and love Christ more. The church must rebuild the body with Christ as its foundation. Rebuilding does not mean brick and mortar; it means the hearts and souls of the people. It means getting the people to see the importance of a missional attitude, a vital work ethic, a variable game plan and a winning faith. These characteristics build quality teams and should also work for the church.⁴⁷

Lovett Weems quotes Rosabeth Moss Kanter who says people do not want change they want things to get better. Weems moves to the heart of the issue of obedience in the face of abuse and opposition. Much of the frustration and anger from the pews come because members are not able to differentiate between change and better. People actually experience change all the time, change is a part of life and is lived with every day. The

⁴⁵Thomas G. Bandy, *Coaching Change: Breaking Down Resistance, Building Up Hope* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 11.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

problems occur when people do not see an act of improvement or making things better as an act of change.⁴⁸

People of faith have no option but to change. Change is not for change sake but for the will of God. While we celebrate the presence of God with us, none of us fully represent the fullness of God's will in our past and in our present that we can say, "We are not everything God ever intended for us to be."⁴⁹ The key is to discover what God's preferred future is and move toward it. Weems says, we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are. To say we much change is not to judge the past except to the extent that no state of things can be deemed as synonymous with God's ultimate will. It is out of God's work among us in the past that we are able to move forward and change for the future. God has a future for us beyond all that we have known and experienced up to now. We are called to discern and work toward that future.⁵⁰

It can be conferred by Weems that obedience to God in the midst of abuse and oppression can happen simply by doing nothing. Weems believes that time may render some values no longer relevant. They become less significant over time through neglect. Similarly, the routine to progress is to determine to face the future building on the positive elements of the existing culture, and not spend time on the areas of weakness. When areas of congregational life must be addressed, Weems suggests they be addressed in the context of the overall mission of the church. It is not as if we are determined to stop

⁴⁸Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change In The Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 14.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 66.

everything to deal with the problem. One can give serious attention to those few practices that strike at the heart of Christian witness without letting that struggle become by default the all-consuming vision of the congregation.⁵¹

On a similar level, Robert Quinn suggests that abuse and oppression in the midst of congregational obedience is nothing more than barriers and resistance. Quinn suggests that barriers and resistance has three primary forms, bureaucratic culture, embedded conflict and personal time constraints. When taken together they form a destructive mantra for members and prospective members alike; conform, do not rock the boat, choose peace and pay and experience slow death. Ultimately, the church becomes a natural funeral parlor for the ideals of initiative of those who seek to oppress due to a strong resistance to change and transformation.⁵²

The author has presented several theoretical models of transformational opportunity for pastors, laity and congregations who seek to be obedient in the midst of abuse and oppression and emerge as vital, sustainable vessels of hope. What has been presented points to change; something that is often misunderstood but always present in every congregational setting. Congregations must seek to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world by increasing the quality of life of members while making new disciples of Jesus Christ. They must recognize that honoring God through faithful obedience will lead to transformed people able to build the kingdom of God instead of maintain churches.

⁵¹Ibid., 71.

⁵²Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishing, 1996), 136.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this project were to educate, encourage and empower members of Columbia Drive United Methodist Church to use biblical, theological and theoretical models of church leadership to transform and grow the church rather than control and divide it.

The goal of this project was to provide a basis for the identification, recognition and eradication of systemic conflict. Systemic conflict has resulted in power grabs, control issues and the slow decline and death of this once vital and vibrant congregation. Suffice it to say, this congregation has been living in its past with delusions of grandeur based on the *good ole days*; a time when the community was predominately European and the members were some of the well to do of the community. Although the congregation has been in a deep decline for years with difficulty maintaining pastors and members, they refuse to awake from their stupor and see the reality of who they are and the results of the choices they have made. Consequently, intense resistance, debilitating denial and lethargy has set in creating hostility and a sense of entitlement among the members.

Recognizing the similarities that exist between the pastor and the congregation, the researcher began to see things that were obscure and oblique. Being appointed to a congregation that was riddled with disorder, distrust and anger has allowed the researcher

to see clearly the extensive negative issues that plague his flock systematically placing them in a death spiral.

Recognizing the reality of their plight has caused the Columbia Drive faithful to feel pain, sorrow and bitterness. They often internalize their feelings and retaliate against the very person(s) who God has sent into their midst to provide a roadmap to vitality, sustainability and revitalization. Columbia Drive has suffered from years of ineffective leadership, a sharp departure from the polity and Discipline of the United Methodist Church and numerous acts of inappropriate leadership from laity leading to issues of distrust, mismanagement, conflict and an overall spirit of lethargy.

The hypothesis for this project was that if the church submits to leadership models of effective authority and team building, it can avoid issues of control that leads to division and reverse its decline in membership. The hypothesis was tested by using a four part sermon series that will be geared toward what scripture has to say about people who rebel and how rebellion leads to conflict and division which ultimately delays God plan for God's people. During the sermon series, members will be given an opportunity to respond to the sermons based the Word of God. They will also be challenged to see if they can identify parallels between the biblical text and CDUMC.

A four part Bible study will be used to educate participants on the will of God concerning following God's chosen leader. Leadership dynamics and the cost of discipleship will be discussed during the Bible study sessions. Participants will be encouraged to identify life applicable situations that are identified through scripture and within CDUMC.

Finally, a church-wide workshop entitled *Rethinking, Redoing and Re-growing Your Church: Moving From Control and Conflict to Leadership and Love* will be used to provide a comprehensive understanding of control and conflict within the life of the local church.

The first sermon in the sermon series was *Maturing through Adversity* from James 1:1-12. This sermon revealed that God never intended for us to stop in our spiritual growth. God's purpose for us is that we grow and become more like the Lord in our daily lives and to reflect more of Christ and less of us. Some people feel that God has been unfair to them and then, there are those who feel that God owes them something. However, God does not owe any of us anything, but because of God's grace and his mercy, God chose to bless us and not condemn us. We discovered that when submit ourselves to God during times of adversity we would discover something about God and about ourselves that will help to transform our lives.

The second sermon in the sermon series was entitled, *Conquering Conflict in the Church* from James 4:1-12. This sermon was designed to help congregations understand the importance of unity in the body of Christ and know that unity is the opposite of conflict. We used James experiential encounters to develop a 21st century methodology for conquer conflict in the church. Conflict in the church has been a problem since the beginning of the church. This sermon raised three critical questions about the church of today; 1) What can be done to get people to get along in the church?; 2) Why is it that church members have such heated arguments?; and 3) Why is there so much contention, strife and division in the church? This sermon also causes the congregation to critically

reflect on The Who, The Why and The How. Who's the cause of conflict? Why are we having conflicts? How do we resolve the conflict?

The third sermon in the series was *Concerning This House* from 1Kings 6:1-14. This sermon was designed to have the congregation consider the church as more than a physical manifestation of brick and mortar, rather the church is more accurately defined as the spiritual building up of God's people. We looked at the work of King Solomon who dedicated a temple unto the Lord that was pleasing in God's sight. The sermon encouraged the congregation to take the example of King Solomon as a replicable model for God's church today. Just as Solomon built a house for God in his day, we have the responsibility of building up our spiritual houses to the glory of God on today as well.

The final sermon in the series was entitled *It's Time to Tear Down the Gates of Hell* from Matthew 16:18. In this text, we discussed how Jesus did his best to keep people from having to spend eternity in hell. We discovered that Jesus was forced to deal with people who could not accept him as the Messiah or the Son of God. We discussed how the Pharisees and the Sadducees were upset because they convinced the religious community that they knew all there was to know about God. By Jesus saying that He was the Messiah went against everything that they had been telling the people over the years.

Because the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not realize that the Kingdom of God had come on earth, they had no intention of losing their sense of power, control and prominence over the people. This is why they were determined to discredit Jesus and under-mind the ministry he came to share with the world. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were blinded by their own sense of self-righteousness like some members of the church. They plotted and planned for Jesus to be killed and were responsible for God

having to make the ultimate sacrifice in order that the world might be saved. And so, the central theme of this sermon for the congregation is that we must acknowledge that one of the most destructive forces in the whole world is the abuse and inappropriate use of power.

At the end of each sermon, the ushers passed out a brief questionnaire to the members who filled them out and returned them to a designated area in the rear of the church. The responses to the questions from each sermon will be discussed and analyzed in Chapter Five.

The four part Bible Study was a study on Embracing Change. In this study we looked at what the Bible had to say about change and how change is what is required in order to be pleasing in the sight of God. By every indication and everywhere we look, change is evident: in our families, our schools, our workplaces - even in our churches. Indeed, the whole world is caught in the grasp of massive, unavoidable change.

In the first session we looked at the church in the book of Acts and we discussed the difficulties, challenges and necessities of establishing the first church after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. We dealt with the notion that change is not necessarily and always a bad thing but a necessity based on the contextual reality of time and space. Participants were challenged to look at how the evolution of the church since the first Pentecost has made great strides with a consistent thorn in the church's side was its inability and inflexibility to change.

In the second session, we first began with a recap of the prior week's lesson and then proceeded to discuss what is required of faithful churches if appropriate and necessary changes can be made so that transformation and revitalization can take place.

In this session we discussed guidelines such as Staying on Target, Developing a Theology of the New; Not a New Theology, Understanding the Prevailing Climate of Change, and Learning to Lead Change. In each session resources were provided for ongoing individual participant study and review.

The third session was a sobering study of the Eight Stages of Congregational Change. The steps were to Prepare Yourself Personally, Create Urgency, Establishing a Vision Community, Developing a Vision and Strategy, Communicating the Vision, Empowering Change Leaders, Implement the Vision, Reinforcing Momentum Through Alignment and Never Stopping.

The final session was dedicated to the number of changes that Columbia Drive United Methodist Church needed to make in order to increase its viability, sustainability and reliability toward a transformed way of life.

The church-wide workshop was a powerful experience in the life of the congregation. It was an opportunity for an outside consultant and expert in the fields of congregational development/redevelopment and developing new faith communities to address the congregation by affirming our strengths and encouraging us in our weaknesses. The workshop was entitled *Rethinking, Redoing and Re-growing Your Church: Moving From Control and Conflict to Leadership and Love*.

The workshop was a full day of beginning with prayer and introductions of the participants, the pastor and the workshop moderator and presenter. The workshop took the form of a coaching session where the presenter worked with the participants to ensure each person grew in knowledge leading to greater participation in the life of the church.

Next we developed a working definition of Rethinking, Redoing, Re-growing, Control, Conflict, Leadership and Love. It was important to have a common definition for these terms because they formed the foundational language for our time together. Once we were comfortable with our terminology we move to an interactive discussion of:

- a. Churches Have Become Battlefields
 - i. What Went Wrong
 - ii. Why Does It Continue
- b. Conflict
 - i. Conflict as a Way of Life
 - ii. 85/15 Rule
 - iii. Theories of Conflict
 - iv. 7 Types of Conflict
 - v. Constructive Conflict
 - vi. Destructive Conflict
 - vii. Calming The Waters
- c. Leadership
 - i. Images of a Leader
 - ii. Understanding of Leadership
 - iii. The Holy Spirit and Leadership
 - iv. The Gifts Based Ministry
 - v. Leadership and Control
 - vi. Developing Volunteer Leaders
- d. Love = Healthy Congregations
 - i. Governing and Guiding Values
 - ii. Fighting In the Church
 - iii. Forgiveness

In this section, we broke out into small groups and discussed each category and then present our findings to the whole group. Once we presented to the whole group, we determined those things that were most important and how they affected our congregation either positively or negatively. We were given opportunity to share our individual thoughts if they were different from the small group and we were able to see patterns of common behavior that existed in the life of our church.

Following this discussion we broke for lunch. After lunch we developed action plans addressing each area. We committed ourselves to systematically modifying congregational behavior and to have another workshop on Church-wide Core Values.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERINCE

In this chapter we will discuss the results of the project based on the project methodology, the data collection instruments and the dialogue from the didactic workshop. This chapter is a critical part of the project as it validates the presuppositions of the author, it proves or disproves the project hypothesis and it provides the basis for an action plan to do further research toward the reduction and possible eradication of conflict, control and power issues in the life of the body of Christ.

The sermon series was built around four sermons that sought to challenge the members of the congregation to do critical and analytical self reflection about themselves and the congregation. It pushed the members to find themselves in the biblical text and it encouraged the congregation to turn limitations into possibilities for personal and communal transformation. The sermon series was both challenging and risk taking as the author had to expose some of the age-old vulnerabilities of the congregation by examining the faithfulness, spiritual maturity and knowledge of God against God's word. There was no noticeable increase or decrease in worship attendance during this phase of the project, however, the number of persons participating in responding to the questionnaire decreased as the series progressed. Overall, the congregation appeared to have accepted the information presented; the next step for them is to begin developing behaviors that will reflect the will of God concerning their lives as the body of Christ.

The first sermon, *Maturing through Adversity* revealed that God never intended for us to stop in our spiritual growth but to use the various adversities in our lives as a basis for spiritual maturity and spiritual growth.

When asked about the central theme of the message, participants used this question to demonstrate their understanding of the preaching moment. Working with, understanding and praying for our enemies represented 80 percent of the responses. Obedience and working cooperatively using godly principles to accomplish a common goal represented 10 percent of the responses and addressing conflict in the church and the community represented the final 10 percent of the responses.

From these responses, it is clear that having enemies is a common problematic issue in the life of the church. Dealing appropriately with our perceived enemies goes a long way toward reconciliation and transformation of the individuals and the community.

When asked; after listening to this sermon, were you made aware of any control or division issues in the church or your life, 100 percent of those responding said they were. Of the 100 percent, 70 percent spoke about control and division issues in the life of the church. One respondent said, "As long as I can remember control/division issues has been one of the major problems in the church. However it has never been publicly named." Another respondent said, "Yes there have always been people who have a need to control ministries, organizations and even people within the church. They need the power to say who can use the facility, who has access to certain areas, what programs will be funded and what the pastor can speak about."

The remaining 30 percent of the responses were divided as follows: 15 percent spoke about division in the church as a result of gossip, 10 percent spoke about conflict in the home and 5 percent said their church has members that just don't want to get to know the other members because of their personal belief that certain individuals are not in their class.

When asked how the sermon addressed the issues of control and division in the church there were significant differences of opinion. The most frequent answer or 50 percent of those responding said that as a result of the sermon, there was a name for the major problem the church was having; namely conflict and control. Another 20 percent of the responses were about praying and dealing with enemies of the church, 20 percent of the responses said that the sermon lifted up biblical evidence to support the problematic issues of conflict, control and division and 10 percent said that the sermon uncovered that God is in control in spite of what humanity may say or think.

The respondents were asked how did the sermon address the issues of control and division in their personal life? The overwhelming response was that when control and division issues emerged in their personal life, prayer and petitioning God was 85 percent of the responses. Becoming healed personally before reaching out to others accounted for 10 percent and the sermon did not help at all was 5 percent.

Was your knowledge and awareness of control and division issues increased as a result of the sermon was the next question; 60 percent of the respondents were already aware of control and division issues in the church; 20 percent said they know that they

cannot handle control and division issues without calling on the Lord and 5 percent said that it did not increase their awareness.

When asked how the participant would work to reduce control and division issues in the church, 60 percent said they would seek God for guidance before moving or taking action; 20 percent said they would continue to work harder as a team; 20 percent of the respondents said they would be more aware of their own participation as a result of the sermon.

When asked if this sermon will have an overall positive effect on the church, only 10 percent felt it would; however, over 75 percent of the people responded that the sermon would cause those who are suffering from the ills of adversity to look at themselves. One person said “The sermon gave me a better understanding of the fact that there is always a cause for dislike by others. I will work harder to analyze the hater and love them in spite of the root of their hate.” Of those responding, 15 percent said even though adversity is unavoidable, people are still left with free will and the right to choose.

Overall, the sermon on *Maturing Through Adversity* provided a positive outcome for the congregation. It is evident by the responses that much work needs to be done to change and transform the habits, behaviors and temperament of the congregation.

The second sermon in the sermon series was entitled, *Conquering Conflict in the Church* from James 4:1-12. This sermon was designed to help congregations understand the importance of unity in the body of Christ and know that unity is the opposite of conflict.

When asked what the main point of this sermon was, 100 percent of those responding said conflict in the church and how to overcome it. When asked if the sermon made you aware any conflict in the church and personal life; 70 percent said yes to conflict in the church. A typical response to this question was, "Yes the explanation is the church is not growing. Why is there so much division and strife in the church? 1) conflict with others 2) conflict within ourselves 3) conflict with God." 20 percent said yes to conflict in their personal life and 10 percent said they were not aware of any conflict in the life of the church. One response was "There is conflict within my personal life with my sons and job. In my church I am aware of conflict amongst members." This response caused the author to wonder if this particular member understands the meaning of conflict or if conflict was so routine in their life that they had grown numb to it.

When asked how this sermon addressed the issues of control and division in the church, 100 percent responded that it did. Typical responses were, "To pray for others if they need help no matter what it is; by letting go and in prayer; by finding an agreement to conflict, by helping members not try and control others knowing that God would make a way; and by praying for the right thing and not just for ourselves."

When asked how the sermon addressed issues of control and division in one's personal life a variety of responses were given. Some of the typical responses were, "Don't speak evil or judge anyone be kind and help those in need; how to play the right way and kill pride in my life, that keeping the conflict going on in my personal life keeps confusion in my life, by putting faith in God and not the world, by being a better listener,

and to pray for answers to conflict in my personal life. Stay prayerful; to be in opposition to God is a dangerous place to be.”

When asked how did this sermon increase your knowledge and awareness of control and division issues, 50 percent said that increased their awareness of being in conflict with self, others and God, 30 percent said that it made them aware of how conflict arise in life and the church and 20 percent said that it made them more aware of the need to be more committed to the church in spite of the division and conflict.

When asked, “As a result of this sermon, how will you work to reduce control and division issues in your church and life,” 60 percent said they would pray to God more, 25 percent said they would watch their own actions when they do not agree with something, 10 percent said they would begin addressing the persons they are in conflict with directly and 5 percent said that knowing conflict and division existed, they would work hard at resisting it. One of the better responses was to “Be open to other ways of doing things, listening to others....remaining calm and consistent with my goal of not engaging in conflict.”

The final question regarding *Conflict in the Church* was, “What do you feel the benefits of this sermon will have on the overall effectiveness of your church life?” 40 percent of those responding said it would bring peace and understanding and how to live better for the Lord; 20 percent said it would reemphasize that God was in control and a surprising 40 percent said not much. One of those responding *not much* said, “Not

much...simply because you cannot mandate that people change thought and control issues they have held for a very long time.”

The sermon *Concerning This House* was designed to have the congregation consider the church as more than a physical manifestation of brick and mortar, rather more accurately defined as the spiritual building up of God’s people.

The first question for this sermon was about the main idea illuminated. 30 percent said that the sermon was about building our personal selves before we attempt to build the church, 50 percent said the sermon was about building and maintain the house of God and 20 percent said spreading the love of God abroad. One comment was, “I believe it was to spread love throughout the church and make sure that the church continues to be a place where people feel comfortable.”

When asked, “After listening to this sermon, were you made aware of any control or division issues in the church or your life,” 70 percent said yes. A few of these responses were, “There are division issues because some of the designated leaders do not embrace change. This discourages people who want to do things to help our church to grow; Yes. I was made aware that people have often put their personalities and own agendas ahead of the word of God and the church; and, The Pastor wants to address these issues so that the congregation is made aware so that a change can come about. To provide more unity and a feeling of community with the church.” Of those responding 30 percent said that the issues of conflict and control would continue to manifest if the members do not begin with themselves in trying to solve problems.

When asked, “How does this sermon address the issues of control and division in your personal life,” 25 percent said by making them want to do more to build up their personal temple, 25 percent said the church should be handled the same as with family relationships, 25 percent said by leaning and depending on Jesus and 25 percent said by not living in the past and suffering when they could do better with God in their lives.

When asked, “How did this sermon increase your knowledge and awareness of control and division issues,” 100 percent said they were aware. A few responses were, “It was a good reminder, I already know about it but the sermon brought it home to the rest of the congregation; I am aware of that but was much more enlightened and want to see how those changes manifest in the future of the church; I know but it takes action and faith to get things done.

The next question was, “As a result of this sermon, how will you work to reduce control and division issues in your church and life?” All the responses indicated the respondents would begin with self and working harder and contributing more to the life of the church. Some of the responses were, “Seek to remind myself always to begin with me; I will continue to work as hard or harder than I do now; I think that I can make more of an effort to be involve in the church and not stay to myself. That I can benefit more from the church if I allow people to get to know me and I get to know them. And, become more active in the church, and contribute more tithes.”

The final question was “What do you feel the benefits of this sermon will have on the overall effectiveness of your church and your life? Approximately 80 percent of the

responses were positive making statements like, “A wonderful reminder of where the wisdom lies; Hopefully, this will be an instructional insight; and, I think it was much needed and I hope the issues of bickering and division can be resolved, and kindness, love, and respect can prevail with the church. Excited to feel more at home within the church. However 20 percent of the responses seemed negative with responses like, “How do you expect God to answer your prayers when you don’t respect his wishes.”

Due to inclement weather, the final sermon received no written responses, however, it was clear based on the reaction of the members during the preaching moment of all the sermons in the series, *It’s Time to Tear Down the Gates of Hell* was the most difficult sermon to receive. This sermon spoke about the great length that Jesus went in order for the people of God to have eternal life. The central question that was raised throughout the sermon was how far are we willing to go in this the 21st century in order that wayward, unbelieving and dissatisfied people can see God.

The Bible Study was from the book of Acts and was a study on Embracing Change. In this study we looked at what the Bible had to say about change and how change is what is required in order to be pleasing in the sight of God.

Similar to the sermon series, the Bible study series was difficult and challenging to the congregation. Persons who attend Bible study are those who typically support pastoral leadership and are the most obedient and faithful in the life of the church. The most difficult aspect of the study was determining how to use the information learned and supported by scripture to make systemic changes in the life of the church. After 20 plus

years of ineffective ministry and diminishing growth, frustration and a lack of hope have become a destabilizing factor among supporters.

Although frustrated with open and ongoing conflict, those in attendance came away with a stronger resolve to transform their church. The text made it clear that conflict was alive and well in the life of the church.

A key issue throughout the study was the notion that some members thrive on church conflict because the church seemed to be one of the only places they could garner power and control. The participants worked on practical ways to resolve conflicts with biblically based teaching.

Several participants spoke at length about the prejudicial thoughts they had about those who seemed to thrive on conflict. Even they recognized it was wrong, they were able to see how they were being not only judgmental but triangulated and manipulated into aiding and abetting in keeping the problems going by feeding into them subconsciously.

The next critical discussion centered on what was necessary to confront and positively address conflictual issues when they occurred. It was determined that members felt the most impotent when they could do nothing about the behavior of those who perpetrated and participated in the conflict. By the end of the Bible study series, the participants came to the revelation that unless the people of God become accountable for their own actions and unless they are willing to work at controlling their own behaviors,

especially when division and conflict becomes apparent, the culture of the church would never change.

The final segment of this project was a church-wide workshop entitled *Rethinking, Redoing and Re-growing Your Church: Moving From Control and Conflict To Leadership And Love*. This workshop was a shared workshop with several congregations which led to a very lively and spontaneous discussion about issues of control and the church. It was apparent from those in attendance that the problems of control had nothing to do with location, size or age of the congregation; control and division issues affected all congregations because congregations are not complete without people.

An irrefutable fact that emerged from the discussion was that most conflict in churches occurs when decency and order give way to position and power. From the various congregations represented in the workshop, rules, regulations and interpretation of those rules and regulations became the focal point. It was argued by some that pastors *wanted too much power*. The discussion became very acute when the image of shepherd and sheep emerged.

In making the distinction of the role and function of the shepherd versus the role and function of the sheep, very little could be said regarding the reasons and issues for conflict. Because shepherds can never become sheep and sheep can never become a shepherd the normal conflicts between the two are non-existent. On the other hand,

knowing that both pastor and people are human, the problems inherent in keeping order become problematic at best.

When asked why is it that sheep want to be shepherds without going through the process of being transformed, little was said. Therefore, control and division has more to do with sin and acts of discontentment on the part of the laity than any other reason.

Although members of the congregation are clear about boundaries, rules, hierarchy and power, the church is one of the few institutions where knowledge of the truth and living out the truth have nothing in common.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Systemic and uncontrolled conflict, power and control issues at Columbia Drive United Methodist Church were the critical issues that gave birth to this project. Research indicates that conflict can be either positive or negative. It can transform a congregation into a wellspring of hope and possibility or it can be the debilitating factor that leads to church decline and demise. Research also indicates that too many congregations have succumbed to the seductive nature of power and control rendering them powerless in the face of critical issues of ministry growth and sustainability. It is from the position of being powerless that this document galvanized its biblical, historical, theological and theoretical foundations for problem solving.

Upon coming to the church over three years ago, the researcher was received with the customary niceties as if he were on a *honeymoon*; however the honeymoon was short lived as he tried effortlessly to assume leadership among the parishioners and lead them to where he believed God was calling them to be. Resistance, resentment, and retaliation all occurred with precision; as if these tactics were well rehearsed and practiced.

Upon entering the Doctor of Ministry program at UTS it was apparent that something greater had to be done. The researcher struggled during the first few weeks of ascertaining the problem statement for the church as he knew that using conflict, power and control would spell certain doom for him. He knew without equivocation that if the

congregation had any sense of him working on a project that identified any systemic problem for the congregation, it would spell trouble. However, as he worked through the process, he discovered that in spite his attempts to divert the central problem to something lesser in scope, he realized that his life was a mirror image of the problems experienced in his congregation. Therefore, he reluctantly proceeded with structuring a program that could be replicated in other congregations with the central theme of conflict, power and control.

Needless to say, the researcher discovered that as he came to the end of the project, an overwhelming sense of confidence emerged within him. He was able to articulate the problems of his context in such a way that affirmed the congregation and provided a heightened level of hope for those who were willing to stay the course and trust the process that the researcher proposed for the good of the church. While there were those who continued to object to the project and refused to participate; those who did participate not only learned a great deal about church revitalization and effective church leadership; they also received a more enlightened pastor in the process.

The researcher was very enthused throughout this process in spite opposition. His heart for God and God's people overshadowed any negative attempt to thwart the success of this Doctor of Ministry project from being completed.

Admittedly, as the researcher reflected upon this project he was convinced more than ever that the act of control within the local congregation has a demoralizing emotional effect on pastoral leadership. The control that leads to division in the local church is one of the primary reasons why some churches are in decline. There have been some pastors who have quit, taken leave or retired from the ministry of local church

leadership because the lay leadership within The United Methodist Church is overwhelmed with control issues.

The context for this project is the Columbia Drive United Methodist Church, an African American congregation in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. Columbia Drive has experienced a significant decrease in membership due to a preoccupation with issues of control which leads to conflict rather than making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The issue of control to be more precise leads to conflict and has a damaging affect upon the spiritual servant leaders. In the book written by Dr. Harvey J. Palmer, *Preachers Come and Preachers Go*, he gives a profound definition of conflict. He states, "Conflict is the natural result when one or more individuals, even with the best intentions, collide while trying to occupy the same space and attain the same goal at the same time-each with his or her own perspective."

After several pastoral and leadership changes, the decline in membership in this context is still evident because the authority of the office of pastor has been diminished to a mere friendly servant and not the spiritual servant leader in which God called pastor's to be. Rather than the Shepherd leading the sheep "besides the still waters," it is the sheep's desire to lead the Shepherd through the rushing turbulent waters. When things go wrong the sheep place the blame on the Shepherd by saying, "I told you so", or "it's your fault".

The objective of this project is to educate, encourage and empower members and readers of this project to use biblical, theological and theoretical models of church leadership to transform and grow the church rather than create conflict from the issues of control and divide the church. The hypothesis is if the church submits to leadership

models of effective authority and team building, it can avoid issues of control that leads to conflict and division and reverse its decline in membership.

The hypothesis was tested by using a four-part sermon series; a four-part bible study; and one day workshop over a six-week period. Although this project did not provide a 100 percent improvement in the attitudes and behaviors of all the members, there has been significant lay leadership that has adopted appropriate sheep mentality and began to practice less control while understanding the importance of pastoral leadership.

The personal positive lessons this project has taught the author is that control and conflict can be elevated by both sides of the spectrum. As pastors, sometime it is hard to recognize limitations and control issues, however, this project has allowed the researcher to look within himself and see that God is still dealing with his imperfection. By acknowledging his own growing edges in the midst of an imperfect context of ministry, it affords him a better opportunity to diffuse ongoing conditions of conflict, power, control and division with the life of his congregation through a nurturing spirit. His ability to be empathetic toward the issues, problems, burdens, limitations and ignorance of his flock is a source of empowerment and sustainability.

Overall the project was successful in that it proved that control and division issues are real and present in this context. It was also successful because it identified the systemic resistance among some members to change and it also empowered other members to work on resolution and transformation.

Those members who are determined to fight pastors just because they can will not change; indeed, they must be allowed to die gracefully while simultaneously attracting new members who will embrace the will of God for their lives, their community and their

church. New members will also allow the congregation to develop and adopt new DNA, new life and new opportunities for vitality.

All is not lost, rather the congregation is in a strong position to galvanize themselves around a knowledgeable pastor who is determined to pastor in a more decisive and radical way. This means that in the midst of power and control fights, the pastor is determined to rise above the fray and provide leadership that is biblically based, theologically sound and theoretically relevant to meet the ongoing needs of those who thirst after the word of God. Little time will be placed on those who are not going in the direction of the pastor who is being led by the Spirit of God to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and world.

The author has learned as a result of this project that he is not alone; many pastors are plagued with issues of conflict and control causing their churches to fall short of their potential. He had learned that his ability to pastor goes above and beyond the issues and agendas of a few in the congregation. He has also learned to communicate and partner with other pastors who serve under similar circumstances. By doing so, he believes that he will develop an effective ethos to be present in the midst of confusion. Conflict and division may never fully be eradicated from the church; however, this author is now better prepared to handle these situations when they present themselves.

In reflecting on the entirety of this project, the author admits that he would do several things differently. First, the project would only be done among those in the congregation who are interested in seeing the progress and success of the church promoted. Next more intentionality would be taken to expand the audience to depersonalize the process. It was determined that the workshop was more effective and

received better because several congregations were present. With this in mind, the author would substitute the sermon series and Bible study series for other forms of data dissemination and retrieval. He would even consider having a guest pastor come and preach the sermons as a revival series and have a guest pastor come and teach the Bible study as a lecture series. This would provide a non-threatening method of extrapolating data from the congregation.

It has been said that good help is often hard to find; this was certainly true when it came to this doctoral project. Rather than getting a few select persons to serve as the context associates, the author would allow all who had an interest in serving to be on the team. It was determined that too often the project was in competition with ongoing church work, outside interest; having a larger group of members staffing the project would have eliminated much of this frustration. This also holds true with data collection and data analysis. The author found that after each section of the project was completed; it was difficult to get the context associates to spend the time assisting in the data compilation and analysis.

Having the context associates validate the results of the project to the congregation is equally important as the project itself. Many members were leery of the outcomes and results suggesting that the results would be unfairly skewed to reflect the desires of the pastor. While this was not the case, having context associates present and participating in this phase of the project would have eliminated this issue.

APPENDIX A
SERMON SERIES

Sermon One
Maturing Through Adversity
James 1:1-12

God never intended for us to stop in our spiritual growth. God's purpose for us is that we grow and become more like the Lord in our daily lives and to reflect more of Him and less of us. Sometimes we become complacent or stagnant in our Christian witness. We feel that we've reached the point where we don't need to grow or go any deeper in our walk with God. And when this happens, when we refuse to change, God allows us to experience adversity causing us to grow. And so, how we respond to our trials will either make us or break us.

Let me ask you, why is it that when we encounter troubles, trials or adversity, folk stay away from the church. Over the years I've seen folk stop coming to church, quit serving God, quit reading their bible and quit praying, all because of trouble in their lives. I've even seen folk who became bitter and angry with God because of their troubles as though God has done them an injustice. Some folk feel that God has been unfair to them and then, there are those who feel that God owes them something. But let's be clear, God doesn't owe any of us anything. But because of His grace and his mercy, God chose to bless us and not condemn us. Not because He owes us something and not because He has to, but because He Chose to.

And so, if we'd submit ourselves to God during times of adversity we'd discover something about God and about ourselves. Let's see.....

God has a purpose for every trial that comes into your life. Nothing happens to you without God's approval or purpose. God has the power to work things out for your

good. Regardless of your circumstances, God can make all things work for your good and your benefit. God's perspective is not the same as yours.

God sees the purpose and outcome of your trial. All you and I see is the pain and the problem. God sees the future while all you and I can see is the present. God promises His presence in times of trials and adversity. God will never leave you nor forsake you.

When faced with adversity, we'll also discover some things about ourselves. We'll discover what our view of God is really like. We'll discover our weaknesses and our strengths. We'll discover how mature we really are. We'll discover what our true priorities are; God's command or our comfort. But no matter what, God is going to have a people that have been tried and proven. And God is going to have a people that have learned how to grow through adversity. God is going to have a people that have become stronger and have become more determined to serve Him. God is going to have a people that are willing to change in order to become more like Jesus in their lives. And so, often times, God test us to bring out the best in us, while Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us.

And so on today, we're going to Learn how to Mature Through Adversity. Today we're going to learn how to Profit From Your Problems so you can turn Trials into Triumph. And so, if we're going to Mature Through Adversity, if we're going to Profit From Our Problems, if we are going to Turn Trials into Triumph. Then there are some facts of Life that we've GOT TO face and accept. The problem with some folks is the fact that they don't want to face the harsh, cold truth about themselves. We all have troubles and adversity in our lives.

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters when you face trials of many kinds... James didn't say, "If you encounter problems consider it joy" but when you encounter problems. In other words you can count on it, you're going to have problems. If you don't have problems, check your pulse. It's a fact of life. Jesus said "In the world you will have tribulation." Peter said, "Don't be surprised when you have problems." Count on it, because problems are not an elective in life. They are a required course. And you don't stop having problems by saying you don't want to have any problems. Nobody's immune, so don't be surprised by your trials because they're coming.

James says, "...when you fall into troubles ..." The word "fall" in Greek literally means "to fall into unexpectedly". It's the same word used in the story of the Good Samaritan where the man fell among thieves -- it was unexpected because trials are not planned. And the fact of the matter is that we can't always anticipate the problems we're going to experience in life. Because if we could, we'd run the other way and we wouldn't get the benefit from facing them. We don't plan to have a flat tire or a crisis, and for some of us, we don't plan to get caught. Because problems are unplanned and unpredictable and they happen when we least expect them. That's what makes a problem a problem. Often it's inconvenient when you fall into it suddenly.

One thing about problems: you don't get bored with them because they're a wide variety of them. Have you ever tried to match paint? The word in the Greek for "many kinds" is literally "multi colored". There are problems of many shades and varieties. They vary in intensity, they vary in variety and they vary in duration. Some are minor inconveniences while some are major crises. But no matter how you slice it, we have all

kinds and shapes of problems. In fact, they come in more than 31 flavors, but then, some of our problems are custom made and some even self made.

James 1:3-4, 3; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Make no mistake about it, our Trials have a Purpose and our Pain can be productive. Our Pressure can produce positivity and our Suffering can accomplish Something. In other words, adversity has value in our lives. James says, *"Knowing this, it's good to know that the adversity that you're facing, the problems that you're encountering have a purpose."* And so, you're not going through what you're going through for no reason. When you go through troubles and trials, you need to know that God is doing something in your life. (I wonder what's God up to today)

James uses the word "trying or testing", a word to describe the process of purifying and testing gold. You would heat the gold up very hot until the impurities -- the dross -- was burned off. Job said *"He has tested me through the refining fire and I have come out as pure gold."* The first things trials do is test our faith and they purify our souls. Watch this, Christians are a lot like tea bags. You don't know what's inside of them until you drop them in hot water. And then you'll know. You see, your faith develops when things don't go as planned. Your faith develops when you don't feel like doing what's right. But when you do, it purifies your faith. And so the more you go through, the stronger you become. "...the trying of your faith worketh patience." Another way of saying this is that, "The testing of your faith produces perseverance. Here, James is talking about staying power and endurance. The ability to keep on keeping on, the

ability to hang in there. The Greek word here is literally "the ability to stay under pressure." The idea is to stay put until the purpose is accomplished.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. We don't like pressure, in fact, we do everything we can to avoid it. We run from it, hide from it, and we do anything to get away from it. But God uses problems in our lives to teach us how to handle pressure, and how to never give up.

Problems Make Us Mature. They make us like Jesus. They help us mature. They help us to grow. *"The testing of your faith produces perseverance that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* That's God's long range goal. His ultimate purpose is maturity. God wants you to grow up. He wants you to mature. God's number one purpose in your life is to make you like Jesus. God is much more interested in building your character than in making you comfortable. And so, if God is going to make you like Jesus, He's going to take you through the things Jesus went through. You see, there were times when Jesus was lonely, fatigued, and tempted to be depressed and discouraged. But the Bible says that there are two ways that God makes us like Jesus:

John 17:17 *"Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy word is truth."* James 1:22-25 *"The word makes us like Jesus"* it builds our character, and matures us. But even if you read the Bible two hours a day, how many hours of your life are you not reading God's word. Therefore, God demands even more.

To many Christians say, "Everything was going great when I first got saved. Then all of these problems came. Maybe God doesn't love me. Maybe I'm not a Christian. Maybe I'm not really saved. Maybe I've missed the boat." But what you need to know is

that you're exactly where God wants you. You're in the process of growing and maturing. He's making you like Jesus. (song: He's Preparing Me)

Romans 8:28 *"We know that all things work together for good" [not all things are good, but all things work together for good] if we love God and are called according to His purpose."* The secret of Romans 8:28 is 8:29 *"For whom he did foreknow He did predestine to become conformed to the image of the Son of God."* And so things work together for good in order to make us like Christ.

Our response to our trials determines the outcome of our trials. Our trials will either make us or break us. It is a matter of how we respond. James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; This is not the way we normally respond to adversity. Often times our first response is to get mad and question Why me Lord. James said Count. Because the word count is an accounting term that means to evaluate. Accountants add up the numbers to make the balance sheets come out right. And sometimes, our trials don't add up from our point of view or our perspective. They just don't add up. They don't make any sense.

But the Word says that we can count it all joy when we know that God is doing something wonderful in our lives. Something positive. Something that will bring honor and glory to Him while at the same time make us more like the Lord.

James 1:5-6 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. How do we handle trials? By asking God for help and understanding. You need to say God, I know that there's something good in this for me. Help me to see your plan and

your hand in this trial and in this adversity. Show me how to respond so that I can get the best from this experience.

And as you're praying for God to give you wisdom, remember what Paul said in *1 Corinthians 10:13* *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

In other words, you are not by yourself because there're a whole lot of folk in the body of Christ that have experienced what you're experiencing right now.

You may feel that God has put more on you than you can bear, but that's not true. Because the God I serve will always supply you with the grace you need to overcome all you're going through. You've got to understand what wisdom is. Wisdom is the ability to properly apply and use the knowledge you have to correctly handle your trials and adversity. A good teacher only tests students on the information that has already been taught. The teacher also wants the students to pass the test. So if you're going through a trial, God has already supplied you with the information needed to pass the test. God's desire is that you pass the test of your trial so you can graduate to the next level of spiritual maturity.

We must believe that when we ask God for help and wisdom that He will give it to us. He will give generously and liberally. *James 1:12* *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.* God says there'll be a reward. And I don't think when we get to heaven the rewards will only go to important folk, I think the

rewards will go to the folk who quietly put up with difficult situations and develop the character of Jesus in their life. He says, there will be a crown of life.

When the trial is finished and the purpose is accomplished there you'll find God's reward. God not only wants you to receive the reward, He also wants you to love Him More. God wants to Crown you with eternal, everlasting, never ending Life.

Conquering Conflict in the Church

James 4:1-12

As we think about the subject of unity, we must be aware that unity is the opposite of conflict. And so, we are going to be looking at what James has to say about how to conquer conflict in the church. Conflict in the church has been a problem since the beginning of the church. And people often wonder; why is it that I cannot get along with folk in the church? Why is it that we have such heated arguments? Why is there so much contention, strife and division in the church?

On today, we are going to discuss the reason for conflict and then, the remedy for conflict; the “Who; the Why and the How.” Who’s the cause of conflict? Why are we having conflicts? How do we resolve the conflict? James tells us that there are three areas of conflict within our lives.

1. Conflict with others.
2. Conflict within ourselves.
3. Conflict with God.

We have conflict with other folk because we have a conflict going on, on the inside of us. And we have a conflict in our personal lives because we have a conflict with God. The Cause of conflict: James 4:1 “What causes fights and quarrels among you. Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” James doesn’t beat around the bush. He gets right to the point by saying that the cause of conflict is conflicting desires. When my wants conflict with your wants, the sparks are going to fly.

Conflict starts early in life, even before you could talk. Have you noticed that when baby's needs are not instantly met, they let you know. It is called arguing without talking. James says, *you want something but you don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.*

Some of us have a Burger King syndrome, we want everything our way. There is no conflict with Burger King because Burger King has conceded and said you can have it your way. If you want pickles or not you can have it your way. If you want onions, tomatoes or not, you can have it your way.

That is the way of life for many folks, because they have a good education, money in the bank, own property, cars, good jobs and are stable in life.... They believe they can have life their way.

We need to realize that we cannot have life our way. When we can only do things our way it causes conflict with others.

Marriage... Has built in conditions for conflict and in many cases we want things our way. (wife & children) when I think about the things I expected of my wife before I got married -- what a rude awakening that was, the day I woke up and found things don't have to always be my way.

All marriages go through three stages: stage one, happy honeymoons; stage two, the party's over; stage three, let's make a deal.

And so, at stage three, you've got to learn how to handle conflict, because it's going to happen. In life, there're going to be conflicting desires and frustrated feelings cause fights.

So what are these conflicting desires

1) The desire to have things: v. 2 "you want what you don't have ... You long for what others have." we want to have things. God created things to be used and to enjoy. And so, we're supposed to use things and love people. But the problem comes when we start loving things and using people. And when this happens we start manipulating, controlling, and moving folk around to get what we want, because things, power, position, and status become more important in our lives.

2) The desire to feel good: v. 3 "you want only what will give you pleasure" it's not wrong to enjoy life. Folk want to feel good. Folk want to be comfortable and folk want to have their senses satisfied. 1 Timothy 6:17 "God made everything for our enjoyment." but when pleasure becomes the number one goal in your life where if it feels good, do it. Or when it's my thang I'll do what I wanna do you can't tell you who to sock it to.

When that becomes the order of the day, you're asking for conflict. I wonder how many women were beat up because of that song. These behaviors are going to cause problems in your life. When your pleasure takes the place over what is meaningful, then you're in trouble. The desire to feel good creates conflict because we've somehow got this idea that the more we have the better we'll feel. And this goes back to the desire to have things.

3) The desire to be number one: I want to be number one. It's my way or the highway. You see, we're living in a world where people are all wrapped up in themselves. All big I's and little you's. Some people have more pride than sense. Proverbs 13:10 "pride leads to arguments." why? Because we're too proud to

compromise and that causes conflict. We don't want to give in because I..I..big I and little you. I or me, this is just me.

Have you ever been in an argument where you knew you were wrong but you wouldn't admit it. Why? Because of pride. Pride causes arguments. That's the bottom line of all these things. But don't take my word for it, the next time you're in an argument, stop and ask "is it worth it?"

4) Unfulfilled desires cause conflict: v. 2-3 "you do not have, because you do not ask god. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." so why do my desires go unfulfilled? James tells us that there are two reasons:

A. We don't pray. James 4:2 you have not because you ask not.

We don't ask god. God can't answer a prayer that has not been prayed. Why don't we pray and ask god for help? Because we're self sufficient. We look to the wrong source. We look to people to fulfill our needs instead of looking to god.

He says, "I'll meet your needs, just pray." and when we do pray, we usually pray with the wrong motive. We ask for things in a selfish way.

The Bible has said that everything I need god has promised to provide. He'll meet my desires to have, to be, to feel -- not just luxury but all my needs. Philippians 4:19 "my god shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" if we'll ask in prayer.

But we'd rather fight than pray. We'd rather argue about something than look to the lord for the answer. And when we're in the middle of a conflict, the last thing on our mind is prayer. We're not thinking about that. But James says, that's the problem. We look to others instead of looking to God and that causes conflict.

The songwriter says, "oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to god in prayer."

B. We pray with the wrong motives. James 4:3 when you ask and you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, or king James says amiss, that you may spend what you get on yOur pleasures.

You may say pastor, I have prayed but to no avail. James say's check your motive. You see, there're times that we pray but we pray with the wrong motive. James said you ask amiss. The word amiss means to be sick or diseased. To ask amiss is to ask god for something with a sick or diseased attitude or motive. And so just to be clear, god is concerned about our legitimate needs and desires and god has promised to meet those needs.

But if we ask god for something for the wrong reason or with the wrong motive or a sick and diseased attitude, god cannot and will not answer that prayer. His answer will be no.

In the next verses, James talks about conflict with god. Pride not only causes conflict with other people but it causes conflict with god. V. 6 "god opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." god declares war on selfishness. Have you noticed that god has a unique way of engineering circumstances to uncover our pride? Just about the time you think, "I've got it together!"

God puts you in your place if you think you don't need him. To be in opposition to god is a dangerous place to be. And if that's you, you're on a collision course with the one who has all power and there's no way you're going to win. And because of our conflicting desires...we have ruptured our relationship with God: 4:4 ye adulterers and

adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with god? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of god. The church of Jesus Christ is married to him and when we're having an affair with the world, we're being unfaithful to our heavenly spouse.

We're telling him that we're not pleased with him or dissatisfied with him. And so, by not being faithful to the lord, we've committed spiritual adultery within the church and we need god's forgiveness.

You see, you can't get away with "your body's here with me, but your mind is on the other side of town" when it comes to being in relationship with the lord. We have to be totally committed to God.

We have covered the causes of conflict. Now let's take a look at the cure for conflict. Verse 5 says that god is a jealous god and that he will not share us with the world. You can't serve god and this world. You will either totally serve god or totally serve the world. There is no in between. You're either having a love affair with god or you're having one with the world. Because trying to love two sho ain't easy to do.

The cure for conflicts:

1) God's grace, we all need god's grace to end conflicts with other folk, within ourselves and with god. V. 6 & 10 "god ... Gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself before the lord, and he will lift you up."

What does it mean to be humble. The Greek word means to be down to earth. Not to have an inflated opinion of ourselves. It is the opposite of sinful pride. Romans 12:3 says for I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to

think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as god hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

In other words, god doesn't give grace to folk who're full of themselves and full of pride. Nor to folk who think "I can do it on my own," for god resist the proud gives grace to the humble. He gives grace when we come and say, "god, I need your help."

2) Give in to god 4:7 submit yourselves therefore to god. What does it mean to submit? To submit means to yield to the authority and will of another. In this context when we find ourselves in conflict with others we're to yield our lives and will to the authority and will of god. We're to obey god rather than our fleshly desires because our flesh wants to prove a point to the other person. When you submit yourself to God." v. 7. You are giving god control and authority of your life and your conflict. You're putting god in charge. And this my brothers and sisters is the starting point. Quit trying to run your own life.

In v. 1 it says "...your desires that battle within you..." James says that conflict that happens with other folk happen because you have unresolved conflict within your own life. You don't get along with other folk because you've got a civil war going on in your own life.

This is the real issue.

Colossians 3:15 "let the peace of Christ rule in your heart." When we have the peace of Christ in our hearts then we'll be at peace with other folk. And when we don't have god's peace in our hearts -- then we try to manipulate other folk, try to control them and try to move them around to get what we want out of life.

A whole lot of folk spend their lives jumping from one church to another or going from one pastor to another thinking that the church or the pastor is the problem. When in reality, more times than not, the problem is not in the church or the pastor, but in them. Changing churches or pastors won't fix the problem. But getting your life aligned with god, will fix and solve the problem.

If you haven't submitted to god, it won't do you any good to resist Satan. Submission to god must come before you can resist the devil. Paul says, wise up! Recognize his tactics. Know how he operates. Be aware, be alert. Realize what he's doing. Realize where the conflict comes from and that he's the source behind it. Don't be dumb. Don't be ignorant. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

The devil wants to destroy your church, your pastoral leadership, and your will to be obedient to god. He wants to destroy your marriage and every other good relationship you have. Why? Because the devil loves conflict. He is in conflict with god and loves arguments. He wants to cause confusion, stress, hurt feelings, disappointment, anger, chaos. He loves to do it.

Conflict has an exhausting affect on us, it wears us down, wears us out and causes us to become tired and don't want to attend church or participate in church activities, programs, or work on Committees. We have to resist Satan. Conflict can fester and grow. (Val & Spiders)

James says you've got to give in to god, let him have control. If you get up in the morning and you don't run into the devil, head on, it means you and the devil are already going in the same direction.

How does the devil operate? He plays on our pride. Particularly wounded pride.

He tells us what we want to hear. He whispers in our ear. He gives us little thoughts, suggestions, and ideas.

When you're in the middle of an argument, he starts whispering in your ear, things like "you don't have to take this kind of stuff. Retaliate. Who do they think they are? Get even. You ought to cuss them out, show 'em who's the boss."

He tells you all the things your pride would love to hear. But in order to conquer conflict in your life, you need to say, "Satan, I know that's you." get thee behind me. I'm going on in Jesus name.

James 4:8 draw nigh unto god, and he will draw nigh unto you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. James say's clean your hands and purify your heart. The hands represent the outward man and how we live our daily lives. The heart is the inward man which controls the outward man.

4. Have a clean conscience

a. Have full confidence in god

b. Have a sincere heart

5. Be sorrowful for the conflict

6. Don't be critical or judgmental of others

a. Remember who the others are.

B. Remember who god is.

C. Remember who you are.

James ask the question, who art thou that judgest another? In our modern day language, James is asking, who do you think you are judging others? It's not your job to judge or condemn other folk, especially when you've got problems of your own.

Be willing to ask forgiveness if you want to stop the conflicts in your life. If you want to get along with other people, avoid arguments, learn to ask forgiveness from god and from those you hurt.

And always remember... it's not about you anyway, it's about Jesus.

Jesus can not only do what we need, but he is what we need. His ways are above our ways. His thoughts are above our thoughts. His wisdom is above our wisdom and his love is greater than our love. That's why can't nobody do me like Jesus, cant nobody do like the Lord.

1 KINGS 6:1, 11-14
CONCERNING THIS HOUSE

For many if not all of us, the next few weeks are going to be very important times in the life and history of this congregation. And so as we stand on the threshold of yet another history making moment, I'd like to call upon your patience as I share a word with you **"Concerning this House."**

More particularly, I want to share a moment of conversation with a king who is experienced in the business of building a temple for the Lord. And for the sake of this sermon, I'd like you to consider the temple as not just a physical manifestation of brick and mortar, but more importantly, I'd like for us to consider the temple as the spiritual building up of God's people. And if you don't mine, I'd like to exchange some ideas with somebody who knows what it means to mount the challenge of creative construction.

And so I thought it would be to our advantage to review this matter of kingdom building with King Solomon who has already lifted up from the ground an edifice for the King of Kings. Because just as Solomon has lifted up a house for God in his day, we've got the responsibility of building up our spiritual houses unto God on today as well.

Solomon, you will recall, resigned over the kingdom of Israel from 931 to 910 BC. Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba. He knew what it was to sit on a pinnacle; to be reared as a royal prince who came to power in the tenderness of his youth. For it was Nathan the prophet who saw in Solomon the symbol of eternal forgiveness, and so, Nathan gave him an additional name, Jedidiah, for he was the beloved of God.

You will also recall that Solomon was known for his wisdom. It is said that Solomon was the composer of three thousand proverbs as well as a thousand songs.

Solomon was skilled in matters of governmental and military administration, and in the arena of international diplomacy and trade. Solomon knew no peer and had no earthly equal.

But that's not why I wanted to have a dialogue with Solomon. I wanted to look to Solomon today because I thought that we might do well, to have an understanding of Solomon's wisdom. For the Bible teaches us that Solomon made his way to Gibeon, and there in a dream God asked Solomon what he would like to be given. And Solomon said, "I want an understanding mind... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people that I may discern between good and evil." And so, perhaps I ought to say at the onset that you cannot build the house of God unless you have an understanding heart. And I declare that with an understanding heart, you'll become acquainted with good and evil.

What a tragedy it was that Solomon had to build the temple in the first place! By all rights, his father and predecessor on the throne, David should have built God's house. You see, David wanted to build it. God gave him time to build it, for David reigned over Israel for forty years. But somehow, David's building plans never got off the drawing board.

Somehow instead of being about God's business and doing something great for God, David was constantly distracted by his own political agenda and his own sense of greatness. And as a result, the people in which he was entrusted to lead, educate, empower and care for, developed a strong spirit of individuality; but not only that, they also acquired a divisive spirit which ultimately reduced their effectiveness as a thriving military and economic force throughout the land.

Make no mistake about it, Solomon could easily have passed the building of God's temple on to somebody else. And that's why I wanted to talk with him, because I know he accepted the responsibility of accomplishing that which his predecessor should have done, and therefore, he didn't have an easy time of it.

I know Solomon had a hard time, because he had to deal with the same folk that Moses tried to lead to the Promised Land. These were the church members that Moses had standing at the Red Sea with freedom in their grasp and liberty in their eyesight. These were the same folk that told Moses, "We should have died in Egypt. We were doing all right with our flesh pots back in Pharaoh's brickyard. At least back in Egypt we had bread; and here we are out here in the desert, and we're hungry. Back in Egypt we had a balanced budget because we had no budget; we had full employment because everybody was a slave. And now you've brought us out here with death behind us and hard times ahead of us. Let's go back to Egypt."

And I don't know about you, but I feel sorry for Solomon, and I'm glad I don't have to face those kinds of problems. For the folk with whom he dealt were the direct descendants of the tribes of Israel that made it to the Promised Land after 400 years of wandering because of their disobedience. You remember the story; Caleb and Joshua were the co-chairmen of the committee that went to spy out the land. Think about it, Moses had them at the gateway of God's promise and some of the folk said, "We're not going." My Bible tells me that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and one-half of the tribe of Manasseh never made it.

You see, they preferred the security of what used to be, rather than the glory of what would be. These were the same folk with whom Solomon had to build the temple, and that's why we need to hear from Solomon.

You see, it just concerns me, it interests me, it intrigues me as to why Solomon would build in the first place; for the scripture records that he didn't have the resources to build. He had to send thirty thousand men to import stones from the quarries of Phoenicia. He had to import wood from the pine cedars of Lebanon. He ran out of money and had to take out a second mortgage, and at the same time he was trying to trade off wheat and oil in order to get lumber and gold from Hiram. And when all was said and done, Solomon needed eighty thousand men who took over seven years before the house of God was completed.

Why would Solomon take the risk to build when any economist could have told him that he didn't have the resources to build. What did he have on his mind that made him want to build the house of God when everything and everybody around him said, "Don't do it."

And I don't know about you, but I'm convinced with every fiber of my being that Solomon build the house of God because he was concerned about the church. You see, without a church, nobody would know what Israel thought about God in whom they served. Without a temple, they would not honor the faith of their forefathers; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Without a sanctuary, there would be no gathering place where the saints of God could praise and pray. And so, I believe that Solomon built the house of God because he was concerned about the church. And so, if we're concerned about God and God's church on today; we've got to build up our spiritual temples so we'll be able to let

a sick and dying world know that God is not dead, God's yet alive. And they'll be able to see this truth based on how we live together in community.

You see, I am concerned that unless the church is moving to new vistas of ministry, the creature will lose touch with the Creator. I am concerned that if our persuasion is only to live in the past, we shall be no more than curators of ecclesiastical antique shops. I am concerned about the church and her ability to serve this present age, which is still its calling to fulfill.

You see, the church must always be responsive to the age in which it lives. And according to Truman W. Potter, the most serious indictment of the contemporary church is that while we're living as citizens of the technocratic space age; at the same time we're trying to run the church as if its a horse-and-buggy operation. I tell you, like Solomon, I am concerned about the church.

Because without the church, where is the place of encounter between Humanity and God? Without the church, where is the soul's shaping ground? Without the church, what shall our children know as their ancestors praying ground? Without the church, where shall we touch the garment of the living God?

You see, because of the church, I can say on today, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I'd rather be doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of the wickedness.

And so, I wanted to talk to Solomon today because he may have some instructive insights on this matter of building a house for the Lord.

Now my Bible says, “And the word of the Lord came to Solomon...” that leads me to say that before you begin to build, you’d better be certain that you have a word from the Lord.

You see, too often and too many folk have failed because they’ve not properly prepared to persist against the prevailing dilemmas that seem to wreak havoc on our spiritual terrain. In other words, don’t come out here by yourself. It’s going to get lonely sometimes. Don’t step out on your own strength, you’ll get weak sometimes. Don’t get hung up on your ego, you’ll be hated sometimes. Don’t get discouraged when your money is funny and your change is strange, because you’ll be broke sometimes. And if you go, you’d better go because God said, Go.

And so all I’m trying to say by way of the text is that when we go, and when we begin to build, we ought to build because it’s God’s will and not our will. And before we can build a physical building for praise and worship, before we can once again own a place where we meet God for adoration and thanksgiving, we’ve got to build up our spiritual bodies in order to sustain the physical build that God is going to provide.

We’ve got to be spiritually strong and spiritually empowered so that we’ll be able to go into a land we know not where we’re going and be confident that God will lead us with a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of clouds by night.

We’ve got to be spiritually confident that even though we go with just a few; that God will provide the increase and we’ll gain a multitude of new converts who’ll be excited about establishing a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord because of the strength of our testimony.

We've got to go, knowing that the mountains are high. The valleys are deep. The rivers are wide. The bridges are broken. Friends are few. Enemies are many. Interest is high. And money is hard to come by. But I heard Solomon saying, "You'd better be sure you heard a word from the Lord.' Because my father David told me:

Except God build the house, those who build it labor in vain. And except the Lord keep the city the watchman watches in vain.

I kings says' "The word of the Lord came to Solomon saying, Concerning this house which thou art building..." In other words, do you have any thoughts concerning the nature of this house? I know you have your architectural design and I know you have your engineering specifications and I know you've made plans and finalized your financial projections, but you ought to know something concerning this house you're about to build in my name.

And so, I hope you'll forgive me today, but I have certain revelation of the Holy Spirit that I wanted to share with you concerning this house. The first thing I need to tell you is that we all know that everybody will not help in the building up of the house of God and everybody is not willing to go when we go. And the reason folk aren't willing is not because they're stubborn, and not because they're evil, not because they're recalcitrant and vindictive. But I've discovered that a whole lot of folk have "bandwagon" religion." They want to wait and see what happens before they commit themselves to the work of God. They want to keep their options open. They want to stay away from the possibility of failure just so they can say, "I told you so." But when victory comes around, they'll be the first to say, I was with you all the time."

The second thing I need to tell you concerning this house is that it is a house. The church is a house, designed as the dwelling place of God. The church is a house, the residence of the people of God.....

And when a new meeting place is build or established, it must be an aid to worship and not the object of worship. The bricks and mortar are an aid to worship, and not the object of our worship. The choir is an aid to worship, not the object of worship. The preacher is a leader of worship not the object of worship. The Bible is a guide to worship but not the object of worship.

For God and God alone is to be worshiped here. Not the place, not the structure, not the stones, not the name, not the history, not the heritage, not the land. But God and God alone is worthy to be praised. The church is a house. It's God's house. And if we want to build up the house of God, God says there are three things we must do.

The first thing we must do is to walk in God statutes. And so, to walk in God's statutes means that we've got to be willing to be governed by God's law. We've got to be willing to be disciplined by God's law. You see, we can't build God's house where there is no discipline. The apostle Paul told the church at Corinth that all things must be done decently and in order.

In other words, God has some laws. God has some standards of conduct. God has some dictates of discipline. God has some ordinances of order. And if you want to know what they are, just check with brother Micah, for Micah says "He has shown thee, O man and woman, what is good; and what does the law require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."

And not only must you walk in God's statutes, but #2, God told Solomon, you have to "execute my judgments." And I know that a whole lot of us don't like the word judgment, but I'm persuaded by the Holy Spirit that God has a word of judgment for the church.

And just because you look pious, there is a word of judgment. Never mind how right and righteous you've convinced your little nest of friends you are, there is a word of judgment.

It makes no difference how important you look in your uniform or how resplendent you look in your robe, there is a word of judgment. Because years later, Jesus went down to this same temple that Solomon was building and found money changers robbing the poor and stealing from the blind. Jesus told them, "You forget this is a house. And it's my Father's house. It's my house. And my house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." And so, if we're going to stay away from the judgment of God, there had better be some prayer in his house. The church ought to be a seven-day a week prayer meeting and every organization in the church ought to be a prayer meeting.

Joseph Scriven said: O what peace we often forfeit. O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer. I hope you're getting this. You see, unless the church is a praying church, we stand under the Judgment of God. And so I hear God telling Solomon. "If you want to build this house, if you want to grow and mature spiritually, you've got to walk in my statutes, execute my judgments, and then #3 you got to follow my commandments."

And whether we want to hear it or not, God still has commandments for the church and God's commandments are found in the sure Word of God. And so when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked, Good Master, what must I do to gain eternal life? Jesus said, "follow the commandments." When a lawyer came to Jesus and said, we know you're talking about the commandments of Moses, but just which is the greatest commandment? And Jesus said, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind... And the second is liken unto it; thou shall love thy neighbor as thy self.

But it didn't stop there, Jesus told His disciples one day, "A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another, as I have loved you... By this all people shall know that you are my disciples; if you have love for one another.

And we can't build a church or our spiritual temples where there is no love. For the Word teaches that even though we speak with the tongues of men and of angles, and have not love, we are as a sounding brass, or a tingling cymbal.

So Solomon built the house of God and finished it. He didn't just start it, he finished it. He didn't just break ground; he finished it. He didn't just talk about it; he finished it. I tell you church, let's finish it. Like Nehemiah standing on the wall, we can't come down until it's finished.

And when we have a mind to work, God can do all things exceedingly and abundantly in our lives. When we have a will to work, God will provide our increase what ever it might be; and when we have a heart for God through Jesus Christ, there is nothing we can't have for Jesus said, Ask anything in my name and I will go to God in order that you might have it.

And so, “Concerning This House”; it is the house of God. And as for me and this house, we’re going to serve the Lord as long as I’m entrusted to leading you into the deeper and eternal things of God.

God bless you and Amen.

"It's Time to Tear Down the Gates of Hell"
Matthew 16:18-16:18

As we find ourselves on the other side of Christmas, there's a lot for us to be thankful for and mindful of as we head toward a new year in the Lord. First of all, now that Christmas has come and gone, except for the after Christmas sales, many of us are beginning to settle down to the reality that the older we get, the more we realize that the commercialization of Christmas is not all that it's cranked up to be.

For a whole lot of us, we also realize that we were once again doped into spending more than we wanted to spend and now have to face the reality that our outgo for the next few months is going to be substantially higher than our income...and for a lot of us...that's going to be a problem. And what this means is that for a lot of us, we'll be finding ourselves in a state of hell and high water where we'll find ourselves robbing Peter to pay Paul, ducking and dodging bill collectors and creditors, and giving God our least and not our best all because of the choices we've made to superficially please folk based on "things" and not on genuine love and affection.

And the sad thing about it is that while store owners are smiling all the way to the bank, many of our gifts will quickly find their way to a closet, trunk or trash can because we really don't want them in the first place, or in the case of our children, many of the toys are already broken.

So the question is this: did we observe Xmas or Christmas. But it really doesn't matter because the damage in most cases is already done. Our charge cards are smoking and our checkbooks are on the verge of collapse...leaving us broke, busted and disgusted.....

And while many of you don't know it...there's a term for what happens to us when we observe Xmas instead of Christmas....its called being played.....or for those who're old school...it's called being taken advantaged of and when folk are played...it's similar to being a resident of hell.

And in our text for today, we find Jesus doing his best to keep folk from having to spend eternity in hell. You see, Jesus is forced to deal with some folk who can't get with the fact that He is the Messiah or the Son of God. In fact, these folk who're commonly called the Pharisees and the Sadducees are the most upset because they've convinced the religious community that they know all there is to know about God. And so by Jesus saying that He is the Messiah goes against everything that they've been telling the people over the years.

Check it out, because they didn't realize that the Kingdom of God had come on earth the Pharisees and the Sadducees had no intention of losing their sense of power, control and prominence over the people. In fact, this is why they were so determined to discredit Jesus and under-mind the ministry he came to share with the world. And the unfortunate part of it all is that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were so blinded by their own sense of self-righteousness that they plotted and planned for Jesus' to be killed and were responsible for God having to make the ultimate sacrifice in order that the world might be saved.

And on that note, as we consider the topic, It's Time To Tear Down The Gates of Hell, we've got to acknowledge that one of the most destructive forces in the whole wide world is the abuse and inappropriate use of power.

As you travel down the pages of the Sacred Text, you've got to agree that God spent most of his time dealing with folk who abused and misused power. And not only did God have to deal with folk who opposed His Sovereignty, he also had to deal with folk who purported to love Him.

And so as we turn our attention back on Jesus and the religious rulers of his day, we find Jesus having to teach folk about the Kingdom of God. And so He uses the terms gates and hell to refer to the powers of evil forces and of physical death. You see, just a few verses earlier, we find Jesus telling his followers to be aware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. You see, Jesus wanted his followers to know that even though the Pharisees and the Sadducees had been serving as the religious leaders and rulers...their primary purpose was diverted to that of furthering their own agendas....in fact, they had misguided folk into an incorrect understanding of God and God's intention for humanitymuch like the observance of Xmas as opposed to Christmas. (Left Behind, Last Prophet) In other words, Jesus wanted his followers to understand that there is a great difference between real power and counterfeit power, and that there was a great difference between Christianity and Church-eanity. And not knowing the difference can be the difference that makes the difference between living a life of wholeness and a life of despair.

And so it was critical that Jesus taught his followers the importance of confronting the gates of hell with the power of God. In fact, He spoke these words in Caesarea Philippi, a pagan city that was filled with moral corruption. And according to history, there was a cave entrance that stood near Caesarea wherein spring water flowed.

And so not knowing any better, the pagans naturally thought of this cave as a door to the underworld.

And so as Jesus challenged his disciples to confront the very "gates of hell" with power from God, He possibly stood near this familiar cave. You see, the cave represented a physical picture of the gates of hell. And so, because of a lack of proper information, Caesarea was represented by the worst evils of their culture; it was filled with idols, shrines and immoral worship.

And so, from the gates of hell in Caesarea Philippi to today, Jesus is calling the church to tear down the gates of hell in modern day society. You see, as Christians, we're supposed to be God's mighty army sent out to wage war against the strong-holds of evil. We're called to attack hell, by breaking down its gates because we're assured of the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord and therefore, we must approach the battle with sin and evil with a victorious mindset.

Let's not forget, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. And when God is for us.....then nobody can be against us...

The apostle Paul says, that our warfare is not carnal, but mighty through God... and it's responsible for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

And so today represents "Operation Tear Down" and we're on high hell alert. And if we're going to be faithful to the calling of God on our lives....we've got to

liberate weak Christians and lost sinners from the gates of hell. You see, we're living in a day, when hell is trying to block the church from reaching the lost.

But according to the Word.... Jesus says...it doesn't matter what the Pharisees say....it doesn't matter what the Sadducees say....and it doesn't matter what you might say...Jesus says, I will build my church and the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

You see, Gate are not offensive weapons. And so, a city never carried its gates into battle. Gates are instruments of defense. They're erected to withstand the assaults of the attacker. And so based on the text, we're able to see that Satan is on the defense. He's like the citizens of Jericho cringing from behind their walls, dreading the attack of God's people upon them.

Secondly, the text teaches us that the church is to be on the offensive, attacking the wilds of the devil. God is calling the Church in this 21st century to take the battle to every place where we see the gates of hell erected. We've got to storm the gates of drug addiction and violence that's destroying our land. We've got to annihilate the denial of AIDS/HIV that's destroying our people. We've got to eliminate broken homes and dysfunctional families. We've got to storm the feeble gates of false doctrine that's crippling the minds of God's people. We've got to assault the gates of discord that's separating the church of God.

We've got to snatch up the gates of monetary income and replace them with a transformed sinners outcome. We've got to replace the gates of world relevance with the gates of bible revelation.

You see, God is calling us on today to saw down the gates of structure and replace them with the hammer of scripture. We've got to replace the gates of programs with the walls of prayer. And the golden gates of cash must be torn asunder and replace with consecration fences. You see, it's important that we realize that God's saints are the only winning saints and if we don't win... shame on us.

In other words, no Satanic blockade can withstand the power of God. You see, the word church is derived from the Greek word (Ekklesia). It's a compound word taken from Kaleo(to call or summon) and ek (out from). Therefore the church is an assembly of the call out ones.

And so, the mystery of the church is that we're called out, to come together....only to be sent back out to weather the storms of life and destroy the gates of hell.

In the bible the church is referred to in many ways. It's called a body to represent its unity. It's called a temple to represent its structure. It's called a mystery to symbolize the supernatural. It's called a bride to convey it's relationality. But above all, the church is called a soldier because it's on the assault against the forces of evil.

Now watch this. It's interesting to note that suits, white dresses, wide hats, and blue jeans are not church clothes; they're clothes for the body but not church clothes. And so, when folk talk about putting on their church cloths or their Sunday Best.....they don't realize that no matter what they put on their physical bodies won't make a difference to the heavenly host.....You see, the clothes of the church are derived from God's armor. And therefore, God is the only armorer that can issued the church's armor.

In other words, the clothes of a spiritual soldier of God are not symbols of prosperity but they're clothes for bloodshed. And according to God and His word, Helmets, shields, breastplates, girdles, swords, and war shoes are strictly for fighting. And so I don't know about you but the church...not Satan, holds the balance of power in world missions.

Jesus, the God of the empty tomb declared power over death and hell. He's the Sovereign and only Lord of history. God is the chief commander of the heavenly host; and He's also the chief commander over the hosts of hell. And so weather you know it or not, the church... not the U.S. Marines is the mightiest force on earth.

And because the Church has the power of God, Satan is trying to desperately turn the church into a business operation and a clubhouse. But I submit to you on today, that the church is more than a life-less organization. It's a mighty organism filled with Holy Ghost power.

You see, I don't know about you but from where I sit, we've been on the defense too long. And it's time for the mighty army of God to storm the forces of evil and rip the gates from their bottom. You see, the term gates of hell suggest that Satan's army is "dug in" and prepared to defend its boundaries. It suggest that the army of Satan is prepared to defend Satan's position at all cost and as a result, the armies of Satan are armed and ready for battle...and the last word I got was that they don't intend to take any prisoners.....

The Gates of Hell suggest that Satan has some stuff locked in and other stuff locked out. And to make it plain....it means that there're some confused church folk trapped inside the gates of hell.

There're so called church leaders trapped inside the gates, lost family members trapped inside the gates. There're loved ones trapped inside the gates. There're hoards of young folk trapped inside the gates. And so, the gates of hell imply many ways to get in, but only one way out. (JC)

And when you think about it....a whole lot of lost souls are dying within the gates of hell. And as long as the church refuse to attack the gates of hell, the captives will remain in captivity, the hurt will remain in bondage, and the depress will remain in hiding.

And if we don't storm the gates of hell, the devil will continue to build pimp houses to pimp the people of God. And so I don't know how you feel about it...but we're involved in a critical time of conflict between the Spirit of God and the powers of darkness. Many of our soldiers are caught between the love of money and the love of mission. They're caught up between the joy of control and lack of participation, and they're caught between the truth of God and the lie of Satan.

For the Bible says, that we can prevail over evil by prevailing in prayer, by the strength of our testimony concerning the gospel and by loving God more than life.

And so, whenever light meets darkness there is fierce resistance. Prevailing prayer will up root the deep gates of hell. Powerful preaching will tear off the hinges of demonic strong-holds. And Holy Ghost unity will crush Satanic weapons of destruction.

But let me say to you, the gates of hell will not fall easily. And this is why we've got to tear them down. Not by our own power but solely through the power of God. In other words, the power of the church lies within the power of God. He's not only the captain of our hearts but He's also the owner and pilot of our souls.

The Lord is the builder and the head of the church. He said, I will build my church. And just to be clear, He's not only its builder...but He's also its foundation as well.

He's the Lord our banner. For the wounded soldier, He's the Lord our healer. For the captured soldier, He's the Lord our liberator.

And so Christ reminds us on today, that we will win because He has already given us the victory. And so as I close and take my seat, I just stopped by to let you know that we will never tear down the gates of hell until we first tear down the gates that separates the body of Christ.

We got to tear down the gates of being on welfare. And we got to tear down the gates of no education that leads to mediocrity. Tear down the gates of laziness and not wanting to get and keep a job. We've got to tear down the gates that somebody else is responsible for our actions. We've got to tear down the gates that cause us to tell folk who don't look like us...stuff about us...hoping that they will do something negative with us that will destroy our lives and families.... We've got to tear down the gates of egotism and we've got to tear down the gates of false security.

Because the last time I checked...God never meant for one man to set-up churches everywhere for self-empowerment and monetary gain. Beloved, of God, "don't get trapped in the business of menfor God's business is not of this world. God is not just on the TV, CDS, Videos and tapes etc. He's still in your neighborhood....waiting for you to take Him serious...and when we begin to take God serious, we'll be able to "Tear Down the Gates of Hell."

When we begin to take God serious, our churches won't look old and unkempt...our pews won't be empty...our communities won't be unsafe to live....our health condition won't be at critical levels and our souls won't be lost. And so I don't know about you but as long as I live.

I Am On The Battle Field for My Lord

APPENDIX B
BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study

Embracing Change

Every now and then God stirs up the world, creating (or permitting) the kind of sweeping change that alters the fabric of history. The Protestant Reformation was one of those times. By every indication, so is our own. Everywhere we look, change is evident: in our families, our schools, our workplaces - even in our churches. Indeed, the whole world is caught in the grasp of massive, unavoidable change. How should we respond? The book of Acts vividly demonstrates that church changes are God's pattern-and seldom, if ever, easy to make. The "trans-cultural" principle that we carry away from an honest study of Acts is that different circumstances require different responses. It is important, therefore, for the church to remain flexible-always ready to change.

Change is not necessarily a bad thing-even for the church. Thomas Aquinas is reported to have said, "If the primary aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever." According to Leith Anderson, in *A Church for the 21st Century* (Bethany), "The same goes for the church. If our goal is to preserve it, we will defensively protect it. If our goal is to reach out, to go somewhere, and to do something-we will willingly risk it" (p. 185). Aquinas' statement, and Anderson's comment based on it, brings Jesus' statement in John 12:24-25 to mind: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

From another perspective, in his book on *Corporate Life Cycles* (Prentice Hall), Ichak Adizes, a specialist on organizational life, adds this important observation: As with living organisms, growth and aging of organizations are primarily manifested in the interrelationship between two factors: flexibility and controllability . . .

"Young" means the organization can change relatively easily, although what it will do because it has a low level of control, is fairly unpredictable. "Old" means there is controllable behavior, but the organization is inflexible; it has little propensity for change.

When an organization is both flexible and controllable, the organization is neither too young or too old. It has the advantage of both youth and maturity . . . This stage I call Prime. *The job of . . . [leadership] is not to create a situation where there are no problems at all, but to lead an organization to Prime* (pp. 2-3. Emphasis added).

The following are some guidelines for churches that are willing to take the risk that Jesus described: to step out in faith and embrace change - whatever the cost - for the sake of the kingdom of God. As you work through them, keep in mind that the goal is not merely to preserve life, but to reach Prime - i.e., to go somewhere, and to do something with "the advantage of both youth and maturity."

Stay On Target - As church leaders, whether we find ourselves in a time of change or relative stability, our first "postpones" ought always to be the same. It is to keep the main thing the main thing. What is the main thing?

In his book *The Purpose Driven Church* (Zondervan), Rick Warren describes it like this: Every church is driven by something. There is a guiding force, a controlling assumption, a directing conviction behind everything that happens. It may be unspoken. It may be unknown to many. Most likely it's never been officially voted on. But it is there, influencing every aspect of the church's life (p. 77).

As examples of powerful - but inadequate - driving forces, Warren lists tradition ("We've always done it this way"), finances ("How much will it cost?"), and perhaps surprisingly to some, the unchurched ("What do the unchurched want?"). He could easily have added reacting to change. From his study of the New Testament, however, Warren concludes that two statements of Jesus summarize the true purposes of the church: the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Regarding his own church, Warren states:

These two passages summarize everything we do at Saddleback Church. If an activity or program fulfills one of these commands, we do it. If it doesn't, we don't. We are driven by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Together, they give us the primary tasks the church is to focus on until Christ returns (p. 103).

Warren is right. The first challenge for churches and church leaders is to stay on target - to maintain our God-given focus of fulfilling the Great Commission to "go and make disciples" in a Great Commandment way.

Especially in a time of relentless change, nothing else is sufficient to keep us on track.

Jesus is an example of how this works. Like the church, Jesus was sent into the world with a mission from God. For Jesus this involved fulfilling his unique role of establishing the reign of his Father on earth (cf. Mark 1:14-15). From the temptation to the crucifixion, Jesus never deviated from this central mission.

How he implemented his mission, however, is equally instructive. Simply put, he fulfilled his "timeless mission" in a "timely way." That is to say, as part of the process of establishing God's reign, Jesus took into account the existing hopes (cf. Luke 1:25-32; 36-38), hurts (Luke 4:17-20), and conditions (Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:11-13) of the people and events of his day-as often as not, in disturbingly new ways (especially to the existing religious culture).

Jesus, in other words, was intent on fulfilling his God-given mission; but he was equally concerned to respond to people with a mercy and compassion driven by love, even if that meant charting a new or unexplored course of action.

The point is that we do not change simply for the sake of change but to better accomplish God's revealed purposes for the church. That is especially true in times like today, where the temptation is to take our eyes off of mission and motive and to focus on other things.

RESOURCES

In addition to the references in the body of this article, the following resources are also helpful. All the resources listed on this page are available through NextStep Resources, (800) 444-2665.

Built to Last Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, HarperBusiness.

This business book has been around for a while. But church leaders will find the research on core habits of a visionary enterprise refreshing: e.g., build the clock (don't just tell time), preserve the core, set "big hairy audacious goals," try a lot of stuff and keep what works, etc.

God's Missionary People, Charles Van Engen, Baker.

Van Engen will help you to rethink the theology and practice of the local church -- on purpose.

Good to Great, Jim Collins, HarperBusiness.

This follow up to *Built to Last* focuses on taking the enterprise to the next level - by attending to level 5 leadership, confronting the brutal facts, developing a culture of discipline, etc. For church leaders, Collins's *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* might be the best point of entry into this conversation.

Develop a Theology of the New...Not a New Theology

This second guideline comes from Allan Nelson and Gene Appel in their important book, *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It* (Word). According to these seasoned pastors - both of whom have been significantly

involved in leading healthy church change - "A brief 'theology of the new' is an important consideration as we embark on improvement strategies within church life."

But what do these authors mean by a theology of the new? In a word, it is a theology that recognizes that the Bible is full of creative, innovative approaches that God employs, some of which are logical, while others seem quite far-fetched. A multitude of biblical scenarios show God implementing or commanding a unique approach and the people responding, "We've never done it that way before." . . . [Indeed] God is frequently doing new things as well as old things in new ways. New means different, that which is not redundant or familiar. Certainly not all new and different ideas are God's. But unless they transgress biblical fundamentals, we cannot immediately prove they are not his, because he so often talks about new things in his Word (p. 11).

The following are some of the verses that Apple and Nelson use to illustrate their point:

- "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things" (Psalm 98:1)
- "See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (Isaiah 42:9)
- "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:18-19)
- "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17)

- "Neither do men pour wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:17)
- "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching-and with authority!'" (Mark 1:27)
- "A new command I give you; Love one another" (John 13:34)
- "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:6-7)

The overall impression we get from these and other similar statements from the Bible is that "God refuses to be hemmed in by man-made ideas and even past proven methods. His newness continues long beyond creation. What haven't changed over the centuries are his desire to do new things and our human nature to resist" (p. 11).

In short, if our desire is to follow hard after God, we would be wise to carefully evaluate our understanding of change. As leaders of churches, this will include leading congregations in the direction of both formulating and embracing a biblically based "theology of new things."

Understand the Prevailing Climate of Change

A third guideline is derived from the life of King David. According to the Old Testament, at a strategic point in his career-not surprisingly, it was a time of great national change for Israel - God provided David with a cadre of trustworthy advisors. These were gifted men "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). There were not many of them, only a couple of

hundred in a nation of over a million. But David listened to them, and they made a difference.

Leaders of churches in today's shifting culture increasingly need to become like these knowledgeable advisors - or at the very least, to surround themselves with people who are like them. Better still, they should do both.

Resources

Keep in mind, as you prayerfully work through this material, the statement of Nelson and Appel that "not all new and different ideas are God's. But unless they transgress biblical fundamentals, we cannot immediately prove they are not his, because he so often talks about new things in his Word."

Emerging Churches, Eddie Gibbs, Baker.

Gibbs has provided the best survey of the emerging church currently available.

Mars Hill Review

This 160-page Christian journal is a superb collection of essays and cultural commentary. Check out their Web page for more information.

The Next American Spirituality

George Gallup, Jr. and Timothy Jones. Provides survey results and introduces readers to a cross-section of Americans and offers insights on how the church can play a key role in reshaping life in the new millennium.

Postmodernizing the Faith

Millard Erickson, Baker. An introductory work, offering six views of

postmodernism - three negative and three positive - and critiques of each in light of Christian faith.

One Church, Four Generations

Gary McIntosh, Baker. The author gives character sketches of each generation followed by suggested ministry strategies tailor-made to fit each unique group.

Learn to Lead Change

A fourth and final guideline is based on Paul's admonishment to Timothy to become proficient in all areas of his ministry - even those he may not readily embrace (cf. 2 Timothy 4:5). In today's world, this includes mastering the art of leading change. Fortunately, there is an abundance of material in this area, though admittedly much of it is not primarily addressed to the church.

One resource that has proven to be especially useful to church and ministry leaders is the eight step process outlined by John Kotter in *Leading Change* (HBS Press). The following outline from *Leading Congregational Change* (Jossey-Bass), by Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr, for example, not only describes each of Kotter's steps but also shows how they can be specifically applied to the local church:

The Eight Stages of Congregational Change

Stage 1: Prepare Yourself Personally

Key challenge: Carving out the time and space to discern God's voice and direction for the leader's own ministry and for the church, and living with the tension that this creates.

Action steps:

- Practice spiritual disciplines
- Revisit God's mission for the church
- Conduct an honest self-assessment
- Proactively address problems
- Find the right pace

Stage 2: Create Urgency

Key challenge: Creating energy for change: being clear and explicit about current reality in contrast to God's ideal.

Action steps:

- Accurately assess and describe current reality
- Make information widely available
- Get outside help

- Make honesty and constructive criticism the accepted and expected behavior

Stage 3: Establish a Vision Community

Key challenge: Creating an environment in which challenge and diversity leads to genuine collaboration and commitment

Action steps:

- Put together a group with enough power to lead the change
- Get the group to work together like a team

Stage 4: Develop a Vision and Strategy

Key challenge: Producing a written description of God's preferred future that is broad and exciting in its direction but clear and explicit in its details.

Action steps:

- Create a vision to help direct the change effort
- Develop strategies for achieving that dream

Stage 5: Communicate the Vision

Key challenge: Finding creative ways that enable the entire congregation to thoroughly understand God's vision for their future and its implications.

Action steps:

- Use every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
- Leaders model the behavior expected of the congregation

Stage 6: Empower Change Leaders

Key challenge: Cultivating a broader base of committed leaders and removing the barriers that would prevent them from serving effectively.

Action steps:

- Get rid of obstacles
- Changes systems or structures that undermine the vision
- Encourage risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities and actions

Stage 7: Implement the Vision

Key challenge: Coordinating multiple, concurrent actions plans and achieving the right pace for the process-in consideration of resource limitations, congregational attitudes, and urgency.

Recommended actions:

- Be clear about priorities
- Treat new initiatives as experiments
- Measure results

Stage 8: Reinforce Momentum through Alignment

Key challenge: Creating an environment in which widespread commitment to follow God's vision routinely overshadows fears of continuous change.

Recommended actions:

- Align existing ministries with the Vision
- Address specific pockets of resistance

Never Stop

In addition to these steps, the authors of *Leading Congregational Change* include a warning that "the transformation of an existing congregation is never a quick or easy process . . . [Indeed] a realistic figure for comprehensive transformation might be five to seven years, sometimes longer" (pp. 12-13). In the final analysis, however, the difficulty of church change cannot become the determining issue. As Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley have clearly seen in their book *Reclaiming the Great Commission* (Jossey-Bass), the ultimate issues for the church are the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and faith. That is to say, the effective fulfillment of "the Great Commandment and the Great Commission provide a litmus test . . . for the collective faith of a congregation" (p. 19).

APPENDIX C
CHURCHWIDE WORKSHOP

Rethinking, Redoing and Re-growing Your Church:
Moving From Control and Conflict To
Leadership And Love

Dr. D. J. Moore
Facilitator
September 18, 2010

Introductions

Purpose of Coaching Session

Definition of Terms

Rethink
Redoing
Re-growing
Control
Conflict
Leadership
Love

Churches Have Become Battlefields

What Went Wrong
Why Does It Continue

Conflict

Conflict as a Way of Life
85/15 Rule
Theories of Conflict
7 Types of Conflict
Constructive Conflict
Destructive Conflict
Calming The Waters

Leadership

Images of a Leader
Understanding of Leadership
The Holy Spirit and Leadership
The Gifts Based Ministry
Leadership and Control
Developing Volunteer Leaders

Love = Healthy Congregations

Governing and Guiding Values
Fighting In the Church
Forgiveness

Rethinking, Redoing And Re-growing Your Church: Moving From Control And Conflict To Leadership And Love

A Transformational Leadership Coaching Workshop

RETHINKING

To think over again,

A possible view to make changes

To reconsider

Different

New

Me

I

REDOING

To do again; repeat

To revise or reconstruct

To redecorate or remodel

Turning myself inside out

Who do I get to be for the kingdom of God

RE-GROWING

Grow Anew

Continued growth after an injury or interruption

Rebirth

Restoration

Revitalization

Rejuvenation

CONTROL

To exercise authoritative or dominating influence over;

To adjust to a requirement; regulate:

To hold in restraint; check

To reduce or prevent the spread of

To verify or regulate by conducting a parallel experiment or
by comparing with another standard

To verify by using a duplicate register for comparison.

CONFLICT

We define conflict as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive
a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.

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LEADERSHIP

Ability to lead

An act of leading; guidance;

Giving direction

Being in charge of a group

LOVE

Love is the emotion of strong affection and personal attachment

In a philosophical context, love is a virtue representing
all of human kindness, compassion, and affection

In a religious context, love is not just a virtue, but the basis for
all *being* and the foundation for all divine law

Love in its various forms acts as a major facilitator
of interpersonal relationships

CHURCHES HAVE BECOME BATTLEFIELDS

Unclear vision

Unclear mission

Non-articulated values

No congregational specific operational guide

Misplaced leadership

Ineffective leadership

Favoritism as basis for leadership

Power struggles

Pushed God out process

Conflict As A Way of Life

Conflict is a part of human nature since the beginning of time

Most conflict is a result of the need to be territorial

Unbridled conflict leads to anger and aggression

85/15 Rule

85% of the time, problems are the results of a process

15% of the time problems are the result of people

85% of the time humans tend to blame other humans;

15% gets blamed on process

85% of the time humans attack other humans;

15% of the time the process is attacked

Principle Theories of Conflict

The opposite of conflict is attraction

We can like one another and be in conflict at the same time

Conflict is not necessarily negative

Seven Types of Conflict

Intrapersonal Conflict – within ourselves

Interpersonal Conflict – between people

Conflict over Issues: Beliefs

Conflict over Facts: Truth

Conflict over Values: Worth

Conflict over Goals: Mission

Conflict over Means: Ministry

Destructive Conflict

Voices are silenced and people avoid one another

The atmosphere is one of apathy and strained civility

People gather in clusters to discuss issues outside of regularly scheduled meetings

People harbor resentment

Rumors lead to suspicion and shunning

Members are dissatisfied with outcomes; feeling they have lost

Voices are silenced and people avoid one another

The atmosphere is one of apathy and strained civility

People gather in clusters to discuss issues outside of regularly scheduled meetings

People harbor resentment

Rumors lead to suspicion and shunning

Members are dissatisfied with outcomes; feeling they have lost

Constructive Conflict

People feel their voice has been heard

People fears are being addressed and allayed

People grow in courage and confidence

People seek to become more informed

The atmosphere is stimulating

People feel energized

People are demonstrating faith in God

Calming the Waters

Effective Problem Solving Strategies

Conflict Management

Negotiation

Relationship Building

Communication Strategies

Leadership

How are leaders chosen in your church

Who makes the best leaders

How do you address ineffectiveness

Do you have well established standards

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in leadership

How are spiritual gifts used in developing and selecting leaders

What would a spiritual gift based leadership team look like

What would it take to establish a spiritual gift based leadership team

What are some of the common issues with leadership within your church

What is the relationship between lay leadership and pastoral leadership

Can it be improved; how (process)

What is the ideal leadership model for your church –
what is the process for making it happen

Leadership Vs Control

Discussion of the shepherd and the sheep

How can sheep become shepherds

Should sheep become shepherds

Why have shepherds placed over sheep

Various Characteristics of Healthy Congregations

George Barna – Habits of Highly Effective Churches

They rely upon strategic leadership

They are organized to facilitate highly effective ministry

They emphasize developing significant relationships within the congregation

They invest themselves in genuine worship

They engage in strategic evangelism

They get their people involved in systematic theological growth

They utilize holistic stewardship practices

They serve the needy people in their community

They equip families to minister to themselves

Healthy Congregations - Governing and Guiding Values

The community of faith is more important than any one individual (pastor/people)

The community and the world is more important than the community of faith

Becoming One in Christ is the way we honor and Glorify God

Fighting In The Church

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11-12

The antidote to criticism is the continual practice of encouragement. When we decide to bring comfort and consolation to others, rather than condescending comments and retorts, we are actually putting courage into another person. When we put down a friend, a loved one, or a spouse, we are actually saying *you are not worthy, you are not loved, and you are not accepted or appreciated*

FORGIVENESS

“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”

If we cannot forgive how can we be Christian

If we cannot forgive how can we be the church

If we cannot forgive how do we expect God to forgive us

If we cannot forgive how do we expect to ever love and be loved

Fighting In The Church

The Bible gives us clear direction on how we are to keep our attitude and mouths under God's direction, not ours. Proverbs gives us many verses that shows us our human weaknesses and fallen state that seeks out the destruction of one another instead of building one another up as God desires us to do.

Our behaviors in daily life and in church are reflections of our motives, each one leading to another, as a chain reaction. By cutting the top of the link of the sin chain, we can remove most of the problems we cause, experience, and endure from others in our personal life, church, and even society at large. The inward choice to hold onto dysfunction and anger is murder because one will lead to the other, maybe not literally, but as a destroyer of relationships.

We have a call to keep our relations healthy by being people who are willing to relinquish pride, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. This is essential before we can go to God. We are to seek resolution to problems quickly, as they come up. When we do not, they fester, get worse, and kill the relationship. Do not neglect your motives or the root causes of broken relationships, sin, and the murder of what God has given you.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

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